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HEROES OF AVANGARD

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HEROES OF AVANGARD #1

War of the Celestianites

CAI ENTERTAINMENT

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Heroes... Arise!

First edition

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Thanks to a teacher named Mr. Hopkins for making me think of this series

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DISCLAIMER

ANYBODY OLDER THEN 24 WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE INTERESTED. FIGHT SCENES ARE FAST-PACED AND THE NOVEL USES A MANGA-STYLED PROSE IN IT'S WRITING. MOSTLY RECOMMENDED FOR AGES 11-20, IF YOU DON'T FIND THE PROSE APPEALING, STOP READING IMMEDIATELY.

Dictionary

Valorent *(noun)*

A warrior who specializes in aerial weaponry such as guns, blasters, or other sky-bound tech. Known for precision, range attacks, and often chaotic energy in battle. Not to be confused with calm snipers—these folks are storm troopers with style.

> "The dude pulled out a Valorent-class plasma rifle like he was ready to rewrite the laws of physics."

Scarrist *(noun)*

A wielder of dark magic, especially those who manipulate energy like the Lunar Element or Nightmare Element. Scarrists are often feared due to their mysterious abilities, illusion magic, and manipulation of shadows. Some are born with this affinity; others are twisted into it.

> "You could tell by the glow—he was a full-on Scarrist, probably touched by the moon."

Vexes *(noun)*

Long-legged, spindly beasts with curved heads that arc backward, revealing massive, gleaming eyes. Usually red-skinned with unsettling movements. Vexes are known for speed, creepy soundless walking, and pack-hunting behavior. Unsettling?

Yeah. Dangerous? Definitely.

> "We're not alone... The Vexes are watching from the rocks."

Uragas / Snow Uragas *(noun)*

Majestic birds that never touch the ground, only landing on high elevations like mountaintops, treetops, or tall structures. Snow Uragas are their frosty cousins, shimmering with icy feathers and adapted to cold regions. Known for grace, sharp intelligence, and being nearly impossible to catch.

> "Only a madman tries to bond with an Uraga—they choose you, not the other way around."

Zirixes *(noun)*

Lightning-infused monsters made of jagged rocks that serve as living armor. Electricity crackles through their bodies, making them volatile and explosive in battle. Zirixes are often found near storm-prone areas and are prized for their raw power and tank-like durability.

> "One Zirix stomp and the whole mountain trembled."

Lirm *(noun / insult)*

A slang term for a lazy Oceananite. Often used jokingly, but it can hit hard if said in a serious tone. A Lirm lounges more than they swim, avoids conflict, and always finds a current to nap in.

> "Quit being a Lirm and help us fight already!"

NOTICE

The people in Iris Town are known as Nomanites, but they have a permit to go to Avangard and stay in Avangard.

TRIBES OF AVANGARD

Celestianites

The Celestianites are the most renowned and idealized faction in all of Avangard. They rule the sky-born realm of Celestia, including the Heavenly Spot, the Golden Region, and the Enchanted Kingdom. As the central power of the CL War, they are remembered as symbols of hope, order, and the original vision of Avangard itself. Their society blends royal tradition with military discipline, producing warriors who are trained not just to fight, but to lead. The rarest gift among them is Cosmonimbous, a cosmic condition that grants its bearer direct access to raw celestial energy. Only one in a million is born with it, and those who are often end up reshaping history—whether they want to or not. Celestianite culture revolves heavily around destiny, prophecy, and the belief that their kind was created for something greater than conquest.

King/Queen: Their first and greatest ruler was King Vigilzante, founder of Avangard itself and the original wielder of the Lost Key. His death in the final war against the Lunaranites became the turning point of the world. According to legend, when the Lost Key fell with him, its impact reshaped reality and formed the very planet of Avangard.

Lunaranites

The Lunaranites are the corrupted mirror of the Celestianites—born from lunar energy, shadow manipulation, and raw emotional rage. They rule the cursed land of Foreshade, where darkness behaves like a living force. Their power is rooted in deception, fear, and illusion rather than honor or prophecy. Unlike most factions, their transformations are closely tied to warfare and psychological domination. They use fear as a weapon before the first blow is even struck. Lunaranite culture prizes control, silence, and ruthless efficiency. Compassion is viewed as weakness, and loyalty is enforced through fear, not respect.

King/Queen: Their ruler, King Dreadixz, was once an ordinary miner from the Narian Caves. After discovering the Lost Key, he was twisted into the first Lunaranite. From that moment forward, his obsession became absolute dominion over Avangard. His war against the Celestianites is not just political—it is personal, fueled by envy, loss, and the hunger to overwrite the world in his own image.

Flamenites

Born of living fire and volcanic wrath, the Flamenites originate from Scarletsville, now a scorched empire of molten rivers and ash-choked towers. Their entire civilization was built on dominance through power. Strength is their primary law, and survival is earned through combat. Flamenite society celebrates destruction as a form of rebirth, placing them among the most offensively dangerous factions in Avangard. War is not a tragedy

to them—it is a sacred trial.

King/Queen: Their ruler, King Scar, is a magma-armored titan capable of becoming a Magma Colossus. Each step he takes reshapes battlefields. His ultimate goal is to resurrect Scarletsville from ruin, no matter how many worlds burn in the process.

Oceananites

The Oceananites rule the Gadian Sea Kingdom, a vast underwater empire governed by shifting tides and ancient ocean laws. Their bodies are composed of living water, allowing them to adapt freely into aquatic forms and reshape themselves for survival or war. Their abilities include controlling tides, forming ice armor, generating pressure storms, and manipulating entire currents. Oceananite culture is deeply spiritual, centered around balance, motion, and emotional instinct. Their emotions are directly reflected through the movement and glow of their bodies.

King/Queen: King Gadian, their sovereign, believes fate robbed him of his rightful supremacy. Consumed by bitterness, he now seeks to flood Avangard and rebuild it into a world ruled by the sea alone.

Electronites

The Electronites thrive in Thunderstark Kingdom, a land trapped in endless storms. Their entire race is infused with raw lightning energy, making speed, reaction, and kinetic power the foundation of their civilization. Their society worships freedom,

movement, and self-expression. They value independence over obedience, making them one of the hardest factions to truly control. Combat among Electronites is fast, precise, and devastating.

King/Queen: Their ruler, King Thunderstark, is known for his laid-back philosophy—but when forced into battle, he becomes Liren, an electrified dragon-turtle colossus capable of leveling armies alone.

Dunenanites

The Dunenanites inhabit the Pyramids of Markilao and the endless Sand Dunes beyond. They are the masters of desert survival, known for patience, intelligence, and deep spiritual awareness of their environment. Their society is centered around balance and preservation. Rather than conquering, they observe. Rather than destroying, they adapt. They guard ancient desert knowledge that predates most modern factions.

King/Queen: Queen Dune rules as both a monarch and a healer. She rebuilt her kingdom from near extinction and governs with calm restraint. But when pushed beyond her limits, she commands the full fury of the desert itself.

Frozenanites

The Frozenanites originate from the bitter polar wastes and were once ruled by Queen Frost. Their powers center around absolute zero control, blizzard summoning, and glacial regeneration.

King/Queen: After the loss of her people and the accumulation of grief, Queen Frost became cursed and transformed into the monstrous entity known as Glacier Loose. Since then, the Frozenanites have existed without a true ruler, scattered and fractured across the ice. Their culture now revolves around survival, mourning, and the fear that their former queen still hunts among the frozen ruins of their old temples.

Earthnites

The Earthnites dwell in the Rufty Mountains, directly bonded to stone, soil, and living terrain. Their bodies are linked to the planet itself, making them nearly immovable in battle. They serve as Avangard's frontline defenders when alliances form. Their combat philosophy values endurance over speed and impact over elegance. Earthnites believe that if they stand long enough, the enemy will break themselves against them.

King/Queen: King Bolder rules as a giant Earth Titan. Though often relaxed and slow to anger, once provoked, he becomes a walking natural disaster.

Blushinites

The Blushinites rule the Land of Hearts and represent emotional resonance as a form of power. Their energy is fueled by affection, unity, and emotional bonds rather than physical domination. Their abilities center on emotional influence, restoration, and morale manipulation. Entire battles have been won because Blushinite presence prevented allies from breaking under pressure.

King/Queen: Queen Relish governs through kindness and emotional intelligence. Under her rule, conflict is often dissolved before it ever turns violent.

Forestinites

The Forestinites live within interwoven tree cities and deep green sanctuaries. They are the guardians of Avangard's natural balance and view deforestation or environmental destruction as an act of war. Their power is tied to growth, regeneration, and natural adaptation. Forestinite society prioritizes empathy, sustainability, and long-term survival over conquest.

King/Queen: Queen Grolian rules in harmony with the living land itself, acting as both monarch and caretaker of Avangard's ecosystems.

Soundanites (Musinites)

The Soundanites rule Musicia, where sound governs every aspect of life. Speech, movement, and even combat operate on rhythm and frequency. Their powers are rooted in vibration, resonance, and emotional harmonics. Their culture blurs the line between art and warfare. Sound-based abilities can heal, destroy, hypnotize, or unify entire populations. Music is law, weapon, medicine, and identity.

King/Queen: Queen Soundzwave's voice is among the most powerful forces in Avangard. Her songs have calmed wars and shattered armies.

Mechanites

The Mechanites of Mechamio once stood as the greatest inventors in Avangard. Obsessed with evolution through technology, they replaced their biology with machinery, sacrificing stability for progress. The result was catastrophic. Their once-great mechanical empire now stands as a rusting monument to ambition without restraint. Despite their current state, remnants of their old brilliance still linger within their war machines and artificial intelligence.

King/Queen: King Gordiman, their clueless ruler, embodies no genius. Though often treated as comic relief, the Mechanites remain one of the worst led tribes in Avangard.

SUB-TRIBE LINEAGES

Reptile Lineage

Sub-tribes descended from scaled ancestors.

- Dragons
- Serpents
- Lizards
- Crocodilians
- Basilisk-type beings

Traits: scales, regeneration, heat resistance, venom, ancient instincts.

Mythical / Prehistoric Lineage

Sub-tribes tied to extinct, legendary, or sealed species.

- Phoenixes
- Leviathans
- Titans
- Dinosaurs
- Eldritch Beasts

Traits: overwhelming power, ancient blood, unstable or restricted abilities.

Marine Lineage

Sub-tribes adapted to seas, oceans, or abyssal realms.

- Sharks
- Whales
- Octopi
- Sirens
- Deep-sea creatures

Traits: water affinity, pressure resistance, enhanced senses.

Bird Lineage

Sub-tribes evolved for flight and aerial dominance.

- Falcons
- Hawks

- Owls
- Eagles
- Songbirds

Traits: flight, speed, sharp vision, wind or lightning affinity.

Mammal Lineage

Sub-tribes descended from warm-blooded land species.

- Wolves
- Cats (lions, tigers, etc.)
- Bears
- Canines
- Hoofed species

Traits: strength, endurance, pack instincts, emotional intelligence.

Meet the Main Cast!

Don

The main protagonist of the story, Don wields the Celestial Element and bears the traits of a Celestial Dragon. At just 12 years old, he's confident without being arrogant, quick with sarcasm, and naturally funny. No matter how bad things get, Don always finds a way to push forward—turning setbacks into fuel instead of excuses. He refuses to give up, standing firm against any challenge in his path, no matter the cost.

Olsen

Don's first-ever friend and closest ally, Olsen is also 12 years old. He's tall and solidly built, usually seen in a green hoodie, black pants, and black shoes, with a short buzz cut to match his no-nonsense vibe. As an Earth Element user with the traits of a Rockslide Ankylosaurus, Olsen is tough, grounded, and dependable. He's academically sharp, but hilariously clueless when it comes to real-life situations—making him both the brain and the accidental comic relief of the group.

Prince

The fastest Lightning Bird kid in the entire school, Prince is pure energy—both literally and socially. At 11 years old, he's always cracking jokes and effortlessly lighting up the room. He wears a blue shirt, yellow pants, and electrified blue speed shoes

that match his Lightning Element. With small blue dreads and a dark skin tone, Prince moves fast, talks faster, and rarely takes anything too seriously, until it's time to prove why he's the fastest.

Demaurion

An 11-year-old Water Element user with the traits of a Leviathan, Demaurion is equal parts calm and chaos. He can be laid-back when things are smooth, but his temper flares hard and fast when pushed. A sly troublemaker and expert prankster, he thrives on stirring things up. He wears a green, white, and dark blue striped jacket, dark blue underwater shoes, and has long brown dreads. Mixed skin, sharp tongue, and zero patience—Demaurion is a storm waiting to happen.

Archie

The resident firestarter, intentionally or not, Archie is a white 11-year-old Fire Element user with the traits of a phoenix. He loves causing trouble... or somehow just falls into it. He wears a red shirt, blue jeans, and orange shoes, and his brown hair curves upward to the right, occasionally catching fire when his emotions spike or just randomly. With pale skin and a reckless streak a mile wide, Archie burns bright, fast, and rarely thinks twice before acting.

The Lost Key Prophecy

Celestial's Fight,
The first fights extraordinary beasts,
Eleven of them at least,
Then once the tyrant is down,
His place as King of the Celestianites will be found

-

Earth's Might,
He must prove strength,
He must prove discipline
Find the Lost Gem
And maybe a miracle will empower him,
As a consequence,
The Lost World will plunge into an ocean still,
This is the trial he has to fulfill

-

Lightning's Surge,
Find his way out,
And maybe he'll survive,
But when you fight against death,
And even combat yourself,

Be sure to try

-

Water's Merge,
Fix the conflict,
Fix the terrors,
That were all done,
By simple errors,
Show them the truth,
Reveal the lie,
Show them what they should despise

-

Flame's Burns,
One side or another,
One tries and the other bothers,
He can't pick both,
Because that wouldn't be fair,
If he let's the other side takeover,
That side will show how little he cares

-

During all this,
During all these times,
These five better bring hope,
And save the universe,
Once they find the light,

✧ PROLOGUE: 10,000 YEARS AGO DURING THE C.L. WAR (YEAR 8000 B.C.E.) ✧

Sand ripped across the Pyramids of Markilao like the whole desert woke up angry. The air burned with lunar beams and celestial bursts, every blast shaking the stacked stone blocks. Celestianites and Lunaranites were practically tearing the world apart, claws scraping armor, wings slicing wind, fangs flashing through the storm.

Blightscaw ducked behind a shattered pillar, his white scales flaring with stress. His golden eyes scanned the chaos while four Celestianites crouched behind him, gripping their glowing Divine Arrows. One shot each before the power fizzled. Miss, and they were done.

"Keep firing!" Blightscaw hissed.

He popped up, loosed a silver-tipped arrow, and watched it punch straight into a Lunaranite's shoulder. Another Celestianite followed, their shot forcing the enemy back before a lunar beam scorched the pillar into a glowing, smoking crater.

Blightscaw's claws brushed the Lost Key by his feet. Heavy. Ancient. Way too important for one Celestianite who definitely did not sign up for this level of stress.

"Where the hell am I even supposed to hide this thing?" he snarled. "Why me?!"

"Because you're the one they can't take down," one teammate said steadily. "You'll get it out. Our world needs you."

Another loosed an arrow and yelled, voice cracking, "Your family needs you! Don't freeze up, Blight!"

But Blightscaw barely heard them because something shifted. A presence. A pressure. The kind that makes your spine lock up like stone.

A violet and black blur cut through the sandstorm, metal glinting.

King Dreadixz.

Twelve feet of Lunaranite warlord nightmare, decked out in spiked violet-and-black samurai armor, long blade humming with lunar energy. His jagged half-mask hid everything except one eye, an eye that locked right onto Blightscaw like he'd already decided where to carve him.

And in one sweeping strike, Dreadixz nearly split him clean in half.

Blightscaw stumbled back, wings flaring in raw panic.

CLANG.

A golden blur slammed between them.

King Vigilzante.

Eleven feet of pure Celestial muscle wrapped in radiant gold armor, wings blazing like dying stars. His long sword met Dreadixz's in a crash that blew sand across the pyramid like a bomb went off.

The two titans pushed against each other, sparks of lunar violet and celestial gold spilling everywhere. Vigilzante's armor was already scorched. Dude was definitely getting cooked. But he refused to step back.

"Blightscaw!" he barked, voice gravel rough. "Hide the Lost Key. Now."

Blightscaw froze. "B-But your majesty, you're gonna..."

Vigilzante shoved Dreadixz back an inch, just enough to turn his face toward Blightscaw.

"That wasn't a suggestion," he growled. "That's an order! GO!"

The force in his voice punched the hesitation right out of Blightscaw.

He snatched the Lost Key, wings snapping open as he bolted into the sky. Sand whipped his face, stinging his eyes, trying to rip him out of the air. Every beat felt like shoving through a brick wall, but he powered through it.

"Don't think! Just move!" he gritted out.

Below, the war raged on. Dreadixz and Vigilzante's blades clashed again and again, each strike shaking the battlefield like thunder. But Blightscaw couldn't look back, not without losing the nerve he had left.

The top of the largest pyramid finally came into view, its sandy blocks glowing under the violent gray sky. Blightscaw landed hard, claws skidding across stone. He jammed the Lost Key into the square indentation carved into the peak.

And the world exploded in light.

White and gold swallowed everything. Shockwaves tore across the battlefield, knocking Lunaranites flat. The raging sandstorm collapsed inward, sucked into the burst of energy radiating from the pyramid and from Blightscaw himself.

He lifted off the ground without flapping, suspended in the swirling magic as his scales lit up like molten gold. A ring of pure light blasted outward, slicing through the horizon.

When the glow finally faded, the indentation stood empty.

The Lost Key was gone.

And the Lunaranites were already retreating.

DARK DON'S PROLOGUE (2 Years Ago)

I wasn't born here.

That's the first thing people get wrong.

I'm not Avangard-made. I didn't grow up under these moons, didn't learn war from Celestianites or Lunaranites. I come from another universe, the Dark Universe, from a planet called Night, where the sky barely worked and the stars looked tired of trying.

On Planet Night, you didn't dream. You trained.

"Again," my instructor would say, every time I struck too slowly.

I never talked back. Talking wasted air. Thinking wasted time. Feeling got you killed.

That's what they taught us.

Then the Gatornites came and proved them right.

Cities burned in minutes. The ground cracked like it was tired of holding us up. I ran because staying meant dying, and dying meant nothing. The escape pod didn't have coordinates. Just a launch button and a warning I ignored.

I hit it anyway.

The universe didn't ask where I wanted to go.

It dropped me in Foreshade.

I remember crawling out of the wreckage, armor sparking, one wing jammed, vision swimming. Then a voice cut through the smoke like it didn't belong there.

"Okay, either you're dead or you're about to explain yourself."

She was holding a pipe like she'd never used one before. Not scared. Just... curious.

I told her my name was Don.

She told me I was terrible at introductions.

Her name was Silicia.

She talked. Constantly. About nothing. About everything. She

laughed at things I didn't understand. She smiled like the world hadn't already tried to eat her alive. I didn't smile back. I didn't know how.

She didn't care.

She stayed.

For the first time in my life, I wasn't waiting for the next alarm.

Then the Celestianites came.

They always do.

They dragged us apart, slammed us to the ground, called me property, called her collateral. I fought. I always fight. A rifle to the head taught me how little that mattered.

Moonforge was worse than death.

It was organized suffering. Camps carved into the first moon of Avangard where Lunaranites disappeared by the thousands and nobody asked questions because the screams never stopped long enough.

Silicia tried not to look.

I looked anyway.

I told her I'd get us out. I said it like a promise. I said it like I knew how.

That's when Azor found us.

He didn't threaten. He didn't lie. He offered a way out, just for us. One job. One artifact. One escape. I knew it was wrong. I knew it was blood-soaked and irreversible.

But Silicia was alive.

And Moonforge was killing her one second at a time.

So I agreed.

The artifact had a name: Lunar Surgicon.

And a purpose: end an entire people in one activation.

When I realized that, I ran.

Azor shot me out of the sky.

I hit the moon hard enough to crack it.

And something inside me woke up.

Lunar fire poured out of me like it had been waiting. My boots burned. My wings snapped open. I rose, not because I wanted revenge, but because I couldn't stand still anymore.

I turned Moonforge into a grave.

Silver fire everywhere. Camps collapsing. Chains breaking. Lunaranites screaming, not in pain this time, but in disbelief.

Then I saw her.

Azor had Silicia.

Gun to her head. Hands shaking. Panic leaking through his voice.

He told me to drop the Surgicon.

I did.

I still had my power. But power didn't matter anymore.

I told him to let her go.

Silicia was crying. She said my name like it was the only thing holding her together.

She looked at me.

She said something.

Something important.

The gun went off.

I don't remember screaming, but the moon remembers.

Half of it disappeared. White and silver energy tore outward, erased Azor, carved a crater big enough to swallow history. I didn't hurt her. I never hurt who I don't choose to hurt.

But it was too late.

I knelt beside her in open space, debris floating like the universe forgot gravity out of respect.

I tried to revive her.

I failed.

I begged her to say it again.

Whatever it was.

Whatever she said to me.

I couldn't remember it.

That's the part that breaks me.

Not that she died.

That I lost her last words.

I flew back to Earth after that. Searched Avangard for miracles. Found none. I hate the Celestianites now, because they took the last thing she ever gave me and left me alive enough to know it's gone.

I don't forget battles.

I don't forget enemies.

But I forgot her words.

And that's why this story never ends.

Because somewhere in the noise, the war, the blood, I know I was loved.

And I can't remember how she said it.

THE BEASTS OF "CELESTIAL'S FIGHT"

- **Second Evolution Scar**
- **Leviathan #1**
- **Markilao Titanoboa**
- **Liren the Dragon Turtle**
- **Homicide the Hydra**
- **Leviathan #2**
- **Mysterious Loose (Queen Frost)**
- **Grolian Beast**
- **Razor Drake**
- **Insane X**
- **King Dreadixz**

I

PART ONE

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

✧ #1.1 — Leaving the Nest ✧

I packed everything I owned, comics stacked with care, books I'd read a hundred times, my toothbrush (because even heroes need clean teeth), and every little trinket I had scattered around the room.

I zipped corner to corner, grabbing clothes, food, and my favorite fits from the closet. Piece by piece, everything slid into my giant orange backpack like it was made for this exact moment.

Somehow, impossibly, it all fit.

I tugged the zipper closed and felt this wave of pride ripple through me.

Like, yeah, I was ready.

The door creaked as I opened it, stepping out into the main room of the house. The cream-colored corridor stretched ahead, and there they were, my family.

My mom stood first, with that look, the one that carried both warmth and worry, the kind of look that said, I'm proud, but I'll miss you more than I'll admit.

Dad stood with his arms crossed, his gaze sharp and steady, masking every unspoken word with silence.

My siblings leaned near the doorway, all grins and jittery excitement, like they couldn't wait to see what I'd do next.

I smiled as I walked toward the door.

"Guys," I said, my voice steady but buzzing inside, "I know moving out might sound heartbreaking. But trust me, I'll be fine."

Mom shook her head, eyes soft but firm.

"Don, Iris Town has been under attack more times than I can count. Are you sure about this?"

I turned to her, my violet eyes catching the light like little stars.

"Mom. I'll be fine."

"Anything could happen," she pressed, her voice low as she watched my hand curl around the doorknob.

Dad exhaled, his arms finally dropping. He stared at me, his tone heavy but calm.

"If you're really going to do this... because you believe it's right... then do it. Iris Town might be the only place that forges you into the Hero you're meant to be."

I nodded.

The weight in the air felt thick, but it didn't stop me.

I twisted the doorknob and stepped outside, out into the wide brilliance of Celestia.

Turning back one last time, I flashed a grin at my parents and my goofy siblings.

"Don't worry. I'll be the best Hero there is, you all know it!"

Above me, the golden sky stretched endlessly, clouds swirling like they were celebrating my departure.

A smirk tugged at my lips as I spread my wings, purple light crackling across them.

Then...

BOOM.

I launched upward, leaving a small shockwave rippling behind.

Soaring higher, the Enchanted City gleamed beneath me like a living jewel.

I turned for one last glimpse.

My family was still there, waving like crazy.

My chest tightened, but my smile held.

Then I rocketed forward, another celestial shockwave trailing behind me.

The city unfolded below, a golden sprawl of towering buildings and shimmering streets, alive with movement.

Dragons and humans in their Celestianite forms filled the skies, darting between skyscrapers or soaring for fun.

Cybernetic cars glided across the glowing highways like streams of light.

I curved around a building, wind rushing across my scales, then blasted upward, breaking through the clouds with a laugh.

"Woo-hoo!" I shouted, flipping backward as the golden horizon swallowed me in light.

And below me, there they were.

The Heroes of Avangard.

Power Z himself cutting through the city skies, patrolling with his team at his back.

Their silhouettes were sharp against the golden towers, guardians of everything that mattered.

That's when I knew it was time to tell you who I am.

My name is Lens Don, the Celestianite.

Ten years old, crystallized dragon, and owner of something so rare it's practically legend: Cosmonimbous.

My scales shine like amethyst glass, and my celestial energy burns in a rare violet hue.

It sets me apart.

It makes me me.

I used to train at Brightened Elementary, one of Celestia's most well-known schools.

But now?

Now I'm older, ready to enter Insane Middle School in Iris Town, the most famous middle school in all of Avangard.

The place where future legends are made.

With money tucked in my wallet and determination burning hotter than ever, I knew I'd make it.

Flying was fun, sure, but after a while, I spotted something faster, a sleek, cybernetic yellow train gliding along golden rails.

I angled downward, cutting through the clouds, streaking past towers until I landed at the station in a sharp skid.

The doors slid open just in time, and I sprinted inside.

The seats were soft, the ride impossibly smooth.

I leaned back, crossing my arms behind my head, letting my eyes close as the train rocketed beneath the evening sky.

Through the window, the Enchanted City blurred in golden streaks, towering skyscrapers, flashing lights, Celestianites soaring, cars weaving, life moving at light speed.

I breathed it all in.

Then I drifted off, lulled by the hum of the train.

When the brakes screeched and the train finally slowed, my eyes snapped open.

I bolted out, my boots hitting the ground of Iris Town.

Night had fallen.

The sky was dark velvet, stars scattered like diamonds, the moon hanging full and silver above me.

Before me stretched a town pulled out of a dream, cottages glowing with lantern-light, sturdy brick houses with tall chimneys, gardens spilling color into the night, playgrounds filled with laughter that echoed through the hills.

Far beyond, mountains cut sharp against the horizon, their peaks glittering in starlight.

Lakes shimmered like mirrors to the cosmos.

It was beautiful.

People moved about calmly, shopkeepers closing up, children giggling, a man sitting on a bench reading his newspaper under a lamppost glow.

Then, suddenly, someone in a suit approached me.

He leaned down, extending his hand.

"It's great to finally meet you, Mr. Celestianite," he said with a grin. "Ready to find your new home?"

I pumped my fist in the air, grinning wide.

"Yeah!"

We walked together through the town, and I could feel every eye turn toward me.

Kids froze mid-play, parents paused their conversations, even the shopkeepers leaned out their doors to watch.

Their gazes followed me like they already knew something was about to change here.

After a while, the man stopped.

"Here we are."

We stood before a house painted deep blue, built from sturdy brick and wood, its triangular roof tiled with gray stone.

The brown wooden door stood tall, waiting.

I stared, my heart thundering in awe.

The man smiled, opening the door wide.

"Welcome to Iris Town, Don..."

I stepped inside, eyes wide, wonder flooding through me.

And in that moment, I knew, this was the start of the best chapter of my life.

TWO MONTHS LATER

Life didn't explode right away, which was honestly weird. I thought moving to Iris Town would feel like stepping straight into constant action, like every second would be a boss fight and every corner had some dramatic slow-motion moment waiting. But for a while, it wasn't like that at all. It was quiet. Not boring quiet, just... breathing quiet. The kind where the world lets you settle in before it decides to test you.

And me? I filled that quiet with one thing: Power.

I was obsessed. Every single day after school, I'd drop my bag like it owed me money, flop onto the couch, and immediately start hunting for anything, anything, with Power in it. News clips, battle footage, interviews where he tried to sound humble but still looked like a walking thunderstorm pretending to be human. Even those over-the-top action shows that turned his fights into borderline mythology. It didn't matter. If he was on screen, I was locked in, like locked locked. Eyes glued, brain recording, heart racing.

I wasn't just watching. I was studying.

Every movement. Every decision. Every moment where he didn't hesitate. Because that's what stuck with me the most, he never hesitated. And me? I hesitated all the time.

So yeah, cue the montage.

I'd be in my room struggling through push-ups while a replay of Power absolutely demolishing a Lunaranite played in the background. My arms would start shaking halfway down before I just collapsed, groaning into the floor like, "This is character development... I think..." Then I'd be outside in the backyard, fists glowing faintly, trying to focus my energy the way he did, only to accidentally blast a gust of wind that sent leaves flying

everywhere and knocked over a trash can. "...Nailed it."

Sometimes I'd pause slow-motion footage of one of his kicks, rewind it ten times, then get up and try to copy it, only to immediately slip and land flat on my back. "...Okay but the form was there." Other times, I'd just sit cross-legged, staring at the screen like it was some sacred text, muttering, "Yo... that's gonna be me one day." And for a second? I actually believed it.

Then came the drawings. Notebook pages filled with his emblem over and over again, messy at first, then cleaner, then sharper. Like if I drew it enough, I could understand it. Like if I understood it, I could become it.

And then it stopped being a hobby. It turned into something heavier.

I wanted to get into Insane Middle School. Not just because it was the best, but because it was where heroes started—where people like Power didn't just show up, they were made. But the tuition? Yeah, that hit like a final boss with no checkpoint.

So I worked. Hard.

I did yard work until my arms felt like noodles. Took out trash like I had a personal vendetta against garbage. Ran deliveries, picked up odd jobs, helped anyone who needed anything. Every coin I earned felt small, but it stacked. And every time I thought about quitting, I pictured Power—standing there, unshaken, unstoppable, and I kept going. Because I didn't just want to admire him. I wanted to stand next to him.

That night, Iris Town felt peaceful. Lanterns glowed softly, kids laughed somewhere down the street, and the stars overhead looked like they were flexing on the entire universe. I was in my room unpacking the last few things, trying to figure out where anything even went. It felt normal. Almost too normal.

Then the ground shook.

At first, it was small, like the world just flinched. Then it hit again, harder, a deep rumble crawling through the ground and into my bones. My hands froze. The windows rattled. Somewhere outside, a dog started howling, then another, then a whole chorus of them.

My chest tightened. "...No way..."

And then I saw them.

Shadows. Massive. Wrong. Stretching across the ground like something out of a nightmare. I ran to the window, and my breath caught in my throat.

Dragons. Black and violet. Diving from the sky like the night itself had teeth. The Lunaranites.

"TO ARMS!" one of them roared, its voice shaking the air itself.

And just like that, everything broke.

People screamed, doors slammed, footsteps pounded as everyone ran, scattered, tried to escape. Kids cried, parents shouted—pure chaos. And me? I just stood there, frozen. My heart slammed against my ribs so hard it hurt, my hands shaking as my brain screamed one thing over and over.

Run. You're not ready. You're just a kid. You're gonna get hurt. You can't do this.

I took a step back... then stopped.

Because underneath all that fear, there was something else. Something small, but loud enough to hear.

Be like Power.

I closed my eyes for half a second, then opened them.

"HEY! STAY BACK, WILL YA?!" I shouted.

The entire street froze.

Every citizen below turned toward me as the wind whipped against my hoodie. My fists clenched at my sides while my heart

hammered so hard it felt like it was trying to punch through my ribs.

The Lunaranites slowly turned toward me.

Their glowing eyes narrowed into cold glares the second they locked onto my glistening violet eyes.

My wings snapped open behind me.

Even though fear was already crawling up my spine, I forced myself to glare back.

Too late to back out now.

"You leave this town alone..." I shouted, my voice echoing through the street. "Or I'm gonna have to make you leave the hard way."

The Lunaranites cracked their necks.

Cracked their fists.

BOOMTH!

Every single one of them launched forward at once, blasting into the sky straight toward me.

My eyes widened.

"Oh crap—"

I shot forward too, celestial energy exploding around my body as I rocketed over the terrified citizens below.

BAM!

My fist slammed straight into one Lunaranite's face.

BAM!

I uppercutted another directly into the air so hard blood sprayed from his mouth.

"OH YEAH!" I yelled.

The Lunaranite crashed into the ground and rolled violently through the dirt while I landed hard, sliding across the street.

"I DID IT!"

"AGH!"

My jaw cracked sideways as another Lunaranite's fist slammed into my cheek.

I got hurled straight through a house.

Windows exploded around me.

Wood shattered.

Dust blasted everywhere.

But I burst right back out through the wreckage, celestial energy crackling around my fist.

"HERE WE GO AGAIN!"

I fired a blast of celestial energy at another Lunaranite.

The blast was messy. Wild. Completely unrefined.

But the explosion still sent him flying backward through the air.

I lunged at another one with a punch.

Missed.

Barely dodged an uppercut.

Then immediately took a knee straight to the chest.

"OOF—!"

BAM!

A backhand smashed into my face so hard I got launched through the air and crashed through another house.

Bricks exploded outward.

Debris collapsed around me.

I slowly pushed myself up from the rubble, gritting my teeth as blood dripped from my nose. One hand clutched my chest where the knee strike landed.

"Damn..." I coughed. "You guys are STRO—"

BAM!

A Lunaranite dropped from above and hooked me straight across the jaw.

I got launched across town, smashing through building after

building like a ragdoll.

Before I could even recover, another Lunaranite appeared above me and slammed both clenched fists directly into my chest.

BOOOOOOM!

I crashed into the ground hard enough to send a shockwave tearing through Iris Town.

The street cracked beneath me.

Dust erupted into the sky.

For a second, I couldn't breathe. I slowly staggered back to my feet, clutching my stomach while the citizens watched in horror. Then the Lunaranites surrounded me, all of them.

My breathing became frantic.

My thoughts spiraled.

I lost control of the fight.

I swung punches wildly.

Missed.

Got uppercutted in return.

I tried to kick another one.

Missed again.

A Lunaranite grabbed my leg, spun once, then hurled me across town.

I crashed through a train set in the middle of the park, metal screeching apart as I tumbled through mulch and dirt.

I staggered up fast and fired another blast of celestial energy.

It completely missed.

The blast slammed into a nearby building instead.

BOOOOM!

The entire structure exploded in a massive celestial detonation.

My eyes widened.

"Oh no..."

I looked forward—a Lunaranite was already rocketing toward me with his claws spread wide open.

SNATCH!

His hand clamped around my neck.

My feet instantly lifted off the ground.

Higher.

Higher.

I grabbed at his wrist while staring directly into his face—

Jagged teeth.

Sharp glowing eyes.

Pure hatred.

"I'll..." I choked out. "Defeat you..."

The Lunaranite laughed.

Mocking.

Cold.

"Really?" he sneered. "You think you're a Hero?"

BAM!

Pain exploded through my body.

I coughed blood as his fist drove straight into my gut.

My eyes bulged.

All the air left my lungs instantly.

He dropped me.

I slammed into the ground, bleeding from my face while groaning and trying not to cry out from the pain ripping through my stomach.

"Geez..." I muttered weakly.

The other Lunaranites slowly surrounded me.

Yeah.

I was cooked.

One of them raised his claw high above his head, ready to drive

it straight through my skull while I clutched my gut in agony.

FWOOOOOSH!

A streak of blue tore across the battlefield like lightning deciding to become a person.

Everything stopped.

The air itself shifted.

Hope crashed into the scene like it had been waiting for its entrance.

Power landed hard.

Like a comet punching into the earth.

BOOOOM!

The ground shattered beneath his feet as his blue aura erupted around him, bright, overwhelming, impossible to ignore.

And just like that?

The fight changed.

Completely.

He moved effortlessly.

Every strike landed perfectly.

Every hit devastating.

Lunaranites dropped one after another like they were nothing more than obstacles in his path instead of the monsters that had just destroyed me.

The citizens erupted into cheers, "POWER! POWER! POWER!"

I hovered weakly above the broken street, breathing hard, bruised and shaking.

Watching, because this... this was what I wanted to become. Power finished the last Lunaranite with one final crushing blow.

Silence fell across the street.

Smoke curled through the air.

The danger was gone.

Just like that.

"Thank you, citizens of Iris Town," Power said calmly, as if he hadn't just saved the entire town in under a minute.

He turned toward me, and suddenly, I felt small again. I felt aware of how far I still had to go.

Power stepped closer, "You fought well, kid," he said quietly. "Real well. You've got the spark of a Hero." Then he held out his fist. I stared at it for half a second too long before finally bumping it with mine, my hand was shaking. And the second our fists touched, something hit me harder than any punch I'd taken all day.

Warmth.

Relief.

Pride.

Hope.

It was the fact that I still showed up.

Even terrified.

Even completely outmatched.

Even when I wasn't ready.

And somehow...

That mattered.

He noticed me.

And for the first time since arriving here, I felt like maybe, just maybe, I was finally on the right path.

✧ #1.1 — (Two Year Time Skip) Leaving the Nest: Part Two ✧

The red carpet stretched before the throne, long, straight, merciless, leading to the portcullis like a path designed for judgment.

I stood beside the throne.

Eyes closed.

Hair spike glowing with sharp white lunar highlights.

My boots clicked softly against stone, lunar cybernetics humming beneath my feet, steady, disciplined, pretending I was calm.

The Lunar Lance rested at my side, angled close enough to my face to remind me it existed. Like a threat. Like a promise.

I inhaled.

Energy crawled through my veins, alive, restless, impatient. I crossed my arms, the Lance lifting slightly as I exhaled through my nose. A low grunt slipped out before I could stop it.

Memories tried to claw their way back in.

The throne room was massive, too massive for how empty it felt. Windows blown wide open, moonlight flooding in, dust drifting like ash after a fire. The banners thrashed as if they were trying to escape their own history. Somewhere, a dented metal can skittered across the floor, pushed by the wind like a

bad omen that refused to stay still.

Outside, Foreshade was silent.

The kingdom was silent.

I was silent.

My mind?

Absolutely not.

The portcullis rattled.

I opened my eyes.

White lunar energy flared from them as I lifted my gaze.

The wind surged inward.

Then he emerged.

King Dreadixz dragged himself out from beneath the portcullis, armor cracked and scorched, each step heavy and uneven. His wings sagged, scraping stone before slowly folding against his back. He looked like a war machine that had lost every reason to shut down.

Moonlight hit his chest.

And there it was.

The Lunaranite insignia.

A masterclass beast, etched and raised into his armor, feral, regal, eternal. Its eyes carved sharp and cruel, its form a fusion of fang, claw, and lunar geometry. Not decorative. Declarative. The symbol of conquest. Of survival. Of a people who refused to kneel.

Even damaged, it commanded the room.

I glanced him over, frowning despite myself.

"What kind of conflict rattled you this badly?"

My voice came out low. Controlled. Almost concerned, against my better judgment.

Dreadixz stopped.

Then straightened, forcing his broken posture upright

through nothing but spite. His gaze locked onto mine, cold lunar fury burning beneath exhaustion.

"Battle with the Celestianites," he growled. "They dragged in the Officials... and Blightscaw."

He limped forward again, clutching his chest as moonlight washed over him, glinting off the beast insignia. His shadow stretched across the walls, twisted, enormous, alive. When he reached the throne, he turned and fell into it with a metallic slam.

The room shook.

He exhaled, long, reverent, rubbing the armrests like they might vanish if he stopped touching them.

"Oh," he muttered, almost lovingly, "how I missed this throne..."

I scoffed, eyes closing. "You're the king. Aren't you supposed to wipe out the Celestianites in one clean strike?"

Dreadixz snapped his head toward me, snarling. He leaned forward, wings flaring just enough to remind me what he was.

"You're a kid, Dark Don," he barked. "A Lunaranite kid. With a lance."

"I'm your second-in-command," I replied quietly, one eye opening as I stared at the dust-streaked floor. "Without me... I don't even know what you'd be."

He grunted and slammed back into the throne.

"Teenagers these days..."

"I'm not a teen yet."

"WHO ASKED YOU?!"

The shout detonated through the chamber, then vanished into dead silence.

I didn't move.

Distant footsteps echoed as Lunaranites filtered back into the

castle, shadows reclaiming their places. Dreadixz sighed, calmer now, and finally looked at me, really looked at me.

"You still mourn for her?"

I didn't hesitate. "She's dead, King. No kidding."

My wings stretched wide, feathers scraping stone.

Dreadixz rose slowly, his voice rougher now. Older. Heavy with history.

"Those were our darkest moments," he said. "Worse than the war itself. The Celestianites..." His jaw tightened. "They humanized us. Treated us like debris under a donkey's hoof."

I stared at the floor.

"What am I supposed to do with that?" I whispered. "I can't even remember her promise. That's all I care about."

Dust floated between us, suspended in moonlight.

Then Dreadixz broke the silence.

"Find out who the Chosen Ones are. And kill the leader."

I looked up.

"They seek the Lost Key," he continued. "The artifact matters. I need it to take Avangard. Zeriath can wait." His gaze hardened beneath the beast insignia. "And when necessary... take breaks. Fulfill your personal quest."

He was right.

I had another mission.

Find Silicia's last words.

So I never forget them again.

Ever.

AT INSANE MIDDLE SCHOOL — MORNING

My alarm did *not* go off.

Of course it didn't.

I launched outta bed like I was late for saving the universe. Spoiler: I was just late for middle school. Equally dangerous, honestly.

Red hoodie? Crumpled on the floor like a defeated Pokémon.

Jeans? Halfway inside out.

Hair? Looking like I lost a fight with a ceiling fan.

Me? Glorious disaster.

I slapped on my clothes, shoved a half-eaten granola bar in my mouth, and bolted out the door like I was being chased by regret.

The sky was doing its golden-purple glow thing—sun barely up, air all crisp and perfect. And for once? No evil portals. No sky lasers. No dramatic boss music. Just... peace.

I hit the sidewalk and jogged toward school—well, tried to.

"YO, DON! THAT YOU?"

I looked over and saw Old Man Vek chilling on his porch, squinting over his *daily newspaper*, which had absolutely nothing to do with me, by the way. Looked like it had a huge headline about some squirrels taking over a bird feeder.

"Morning, Mr. Vek!" I called out, already speed-walking like my life depended on it.

"You're runnin' late again, huh?" he said, sipping a mug of something suspiciously green. "You know what happened the last time you skipped breakfast—you tried to fight a fire hydrant."

"*ONE TIME,* Mr. Vek! ONE TIME!" I shouted back, wheezing.

He cackled so hard he nearly dropped his mug.

"Watch out for those hydrants, kid!" he called after me. "They've got teeth!"

I waved as I turned the corner, smiling even though I was already feeling the panic start to bubble.

As I passed the playground, chaos erupted.

A bunch of little kids spotted me from behind the fence like they were spotting Bigfoot in sneakers.

"IT'S DON!"

"THE GUY WHO ACCIDENTALLY FLEW INTO A TREE LAST MONTH!"

"HE'S GOT POWERS!!!"

I spun around, grinning, and struck a superhero pose. "Still just Don. My only superpower is being fashionably late."

"CAN YOU FLY?!"

"Nope! But I can trip with dramatic flair!"

They cracked up like it was the funniest thing they'd ever heard. Honestly? I was kinda proud of that one.

Then came the rest of the walk. I passed Mrs. Lenu, sweeping outside her corner shop like she was about to start breakdancing with the broom.

"Morning, Don," she said, not even looking up. "You're running."

"Gotta hustle or I'll be toast!"

She smirked. "Well, don't burn yourself."

I gave her a little salute, then promptly tripped on a pebble. Smooth.

By now, people were peeking out their windows, giving me little nods, waves, and "there goes that boy again" kind of looks. Cars honked—not in an angry way, but in that "you got this!" way.

Mr. Nibbs, the ice cream guy, tossed me a frozen pop. I caught

it without stopping.

"You're gonna need the energy, hero boy!" he laughed.

I turned down another block—and that's when I saw Jax the mailman absolutely getting *wrecked* by two rogue delivery bots going full Terminator. One was flailing around with a barcode scanner like it was a sword. The other looked like it was about to explode over a misdelivered envelope.

"JAX!" I yelled, already channeling a soft purple glow into my hands.

In five seconds flat, I zapped one bot into standby mode, then tripped the other one with a banana peel I'd *completely forgotten* was in my pocket. Don't ask why. It's Don logic.

"You good?" I asked as I helped Jax up.

He blinked. "Did you just throw a fruit-based projectile?"

"Strategic potassium-based takedown. Totally intentional."

"...You're late for school again, aren't you?"

I checked the time on my phone—and my heart *dropped.*

"8:27?! BRO I'M GONNA GET DETENTION FOR ETERNITY."

And then I screamed.

Like, loud. Birds flew out of trees. Someone across the street dropped a smoothie. I was full Gremlin Mode.

I booked it. Hard. Backpack flapping, sneakers skidding, frozen pop still in my mouth like a champion.

As I darted across town, Old Man Vek shouted from three blocks back:

"RUN LIKE THE WIND, YOU LITTLE ELEMENTAL WEIRDO!"

And that, my friend, is how my morning started. No prophecies. No shadowy figures. No ancient secrets.

Just a red hoodie, a late kid, and a whole town that somehow still loved me even when I tripped over my own shoelace.

I was sprinting through the school hallway.

Like—*full send*.

Like—*if I stop, I die*.

Because yeah.

That part was not a metaphor.

Lockers streaked by in metallic blurs. Sneakers slapped tile. Footsteps hammered behind me. Someone screamed—my name, maybe.

Name's Lens Don.

Twelve.

Celestianite.

Dragon traits. Horns. Wings. Tail. The whole mythical starter pack.

And no, I did not wake up today planning to almost die before first period.

But here we are.

Corner—too sharp.

I skidded. Claws scraped tile. Wings flared on instinct, catching air just long enough to keep me upright. Sunlight flashed off my purple crystal horns like hazard lights. My wings—crystal feathers layered with soft scales—beat once. Controlled. Barely. My violet tail snapped behind me, white stripes blurring as I ran.

For the record?

I look sick.

I just don't *feel* sick.

Red hoodie, blue jeans, black-and-red sneakers, and a buzz cut.

Just an average black kid tearing through a very not-average school while elemental chaos casually violated every safety regulation ever written.

Everyone's born with an Element here.

Fire. Ice. Earth. Lightning. Plant. Weird stuff.

Normal.

Mine?

Celestial.

Light-purple energy. Rare. Dangerous. Anime-level nonsense just waiting to ruin my schedule. And if I ever collect all nine Power Gems?

Yeah. Reality starts wobbling.

See, we live in a world called Avangard.

Never heard of it?

Well technically, it's planet Earth but reformatted with only two large continents.

With one of the larger ones being Avangard.

Everyone called here that was born in Avangard, is an Elementanite or an Avangardian. You could say both, they're the same thing.

I wanna be a hero. A real one. A Hero of Avangard.

Not just the loud kid.

Not the weird kid with too much confidence and not enough chill.

I wanna be worthy.

Which is hilarious, because at that exact moment—

—I was late for class and hurdling an ice river.

I vaulted Emely's frozen hallway disaster.

"Watch it, Ice Bird!"

"Sorry!" she yelled, already melting it. Ice Element. Hyper. Absolute menace.

Heat spiked.

Fireballs.

ARCHIE!

I flared my wings and tail-whipped a flaming orb into a locker. It crumpled like paper.

"Fifth time this week!" he shouted, laughing.

"Hush it, hair fryer!"

The walls exploded with green.

Vines. Thorns. Branches everywhere.

Lonnie Mae—Plant Element—vibing like this was recess.

I vaulted high, slid low, barely avoided getting clotheslined by a thorny nightmare.

CRACK—

Lightning tore past me.

Prince.

"NO RUNNING IN THE HALLS!" the principal screamed.

Prince didn't stop.

He *flew*.

"NO FLYING EITHER!"

Classic Prince.

Rock pillars—ducked Olsen's.

Sticky webs—sidestepped Keyler's.

And Ella?

Ella just stood there. Calm and unbothered. Like the apocalypse was optional.

Room 101.

I slid in like an action movie stunt—

—and immediately died socially.

Everyone was seated.

Every kid I passed?

Watching.

Judging.

Mentally roasting me.

I froze in the doorway.

Error 404: confidence not found.

Mr. Bassi looked up.

Twenty-four. Half man, half bull. Massive curled horns like bad decisions waiting to happen. White shirt. Green pants. Cleanest crew cut I've ever seen.

"You're late."

"Technically I arrived in one second so I'm not that—"

"Sit."

He smirked.

I dropped into the front row.

History. Allegedly.

Bassi turned to the board.

And didn't move.

"So... aren't you gonna teach?" Mason asked.

Bassi blinked. "Wait. This is history?"

Collective facepalm.

He sighed. "I'm a math teacher. History's not my thing. Civil War or—"

"THE HISTORY OF AVANGARD!"

"...Right. That. Knew that."

He hauled out a massive ancient book and cracked it open like he was speedrunning destiny.

"Year 8000 B.C.E. Before the Celestial Era. The CL War began. It started with an artifact—the Lost Key—hidden by a Celestianite to keep it from Lunaranite hands."

The room leaned in.

"The Lunaranites—evil, conquest-obsessed, zero chill—were led by Dreadixz. Real 'world domination' energy."

Pages flipped.

"The Celestianites fought back. Dragon-like beings of Light, Astral, and Celestial power. White and gold scales. Halo-shaped

horns. Feathered. Scaled. Terrifyingly strong."

Another page.

"The Lunaranites? Black and purple. Sharp scales. Curved horns. Walking narcissists."

He read *that* speech.

'YOU WANT POWER? CONTROL? REVENGE? FOLLOW ME—DREADIXZ, SHADOW LORD!'

Even Bassi paused.

Yeah. It went hard.

"In the final clash," he continued, "Vigilzante—the Celestianite leader—fell. But before dying, he wrote a prophecy."

He read it aloud.

Silence followed.

Then—

BZZZT!

The intercom screamed.

"ATTENTION STUDENTS! A BRIGHT LUNAR-LIKE OBJECT IS APPROACHING AT MAX SPEED! EVACUATE IMMEDIATELY!"

I shot up. "—WE JUST GOT TO CLASS!"

Chaos detonated.

The sun dimmed.

The sky twisted white.

Thunder cracked like reality snapping its knuckles.

Wind slammed the building.

Bassi went pale. "Oh, crap."

"EVERYBODY OUT!"

I ran—

BOOM.

The roof exploded.

White lunar energy tore through the room and launched me across it. Desks shattered. Dust filled my lungs. Pain detonated

through my body.

I groaned. Pushed myself up. Ears ringing.

The smoke thinned.

And there he was.

My height.

That's what my brain focused on—because everything else about him was screaming wrong.

And deep down?

I already knew.

This was not a normal school day anymore.

He stood in the smoke like a living eclipse. Black hair slashed through with jagged white streaks. Eyes glowing silver—flat, merciless, not even pretending to be human. His sleek silver dragon wings sliced the haze behind him, each slow movement deliberate. His tail snapped once, sharp and metallic, precise like it had been programmed to kill.

His torso was cybernetic—layered white-and-black armor fused to dark skin, lunar-blue veins glowing beneath the plating like trapped lightning. The Lunaranite insignia burned across his chest, pulsing like a heartbeat that wasn't his own.

Arms reinforced with black cybernetics. Silver shoulders carved with glowing lunar etchings. Forearms streaked with black like gravity itself had clawed into them. White gloves lined with razor-thin silver patterns gripped a towering Lunar Lance, humming softly—hungry.

His boots cracked against the floor, white cyber-shoes laced with silver plates and black energy veins that warped gravity with every step.

Silver thigh armor. Black knee guards. Cybernetic legs gleaming like weapons built to move faster than fear.

This wasn't a villain.

He was an event.

"You," he said calmly, voice low and razor-clean, slicing through the chaos like it wasn't even there. "One of the Five Chosen Ones. Confident. Relentless."

Celestial energy flared around me, violet sparks snapping in the air like broken nerves.

"Who—who are you?!"

He stepped closer. Casual. Like the burning room was background noise.

"Dark Don," he said. "Bounty hunter. Scarrist." His silver eyes locked onto mine. "The version of you that's better in every way."

I didn't even blink.

His fist detonated into my face.

Pain exploded across my skull as my body launched backward—through a bookshelf, wood splintering, shelves collapsing on impact. My vision swam.

But I didn't stay down.

Violet energy surged from my arms, jagged and wild. I shoved off the ground, catching his next punch mid-air and blasting him back with a violent burst. My eyes burned bright violet.

I swung—everything I had—and connected with his jaw.

He staggered.

Five seconds.

Five seconds of hope.

Then he vanished.

A blur of lunar grace.

His knee slammed into my gut. Air left my lungs. He flung me down the hallway like I weighed nothing—

—and the cafeteria doors exploded.

Chaos erupted.

Kids screamed like airhorns shoved into blenders. Teachers shouted over each other.

"EVERYONE TO THE EXITS!"

"NO—NOT NEAR THE—WHAT IS HAPPENING?!"

"IS THAT LUNAR ENERGY?! CALL THE FIRE DEPARTMENT—AND THE POLICE—AND PROBABLY A DRAGON OR TWO!"

Sirens wailed outside. Fire trucks roared in. Hoses blasted water everywhere. Glass shattered. Panic ruled.

Cementos the Bull charged, horns lowered.

"FREEZE! HANDS UP!"

"Or you're lunch!" someone yelled.

Dark Don glanced sideways.

Bored.

"More pests."

He raised a hand.

A lunar pulse tore through the air.

Cementos smashed forward, concrete spikes erupting from the floor—Dark Don sliced through them effortlessly. One lunar punch sent the bull-man skidding across the cafeteria like debris.

Nyx the Panther leapt, claws carving sonic arcs.

"YOU LUNARANITE—!"

Backhanded into a table.

Smite hurled a mist bomb. Titus launched red-glowing fists.

Dark Don stepped through the chaos and released a single slash of white lunar energy—

—all three detonated mid-air.

Lila surged with water, shouting, "WHY WERE YOU SENT HERE?!"

Dark Don sidestepped, grabbed her arm, and slammed her through the floor.

Crater.

And through all of it—he still had me by the collar.

My punches did nothing.

"You're not ready," he said flatly, dragging me through wreckage and screams. "Celestial energy won't save you."

I coughed blood. Sparks flickered weakly.

"You lack strength."

"WHO—WHO INVITED YOU?!" I gasped.

A thin, merciless smile touched his lips.

"I'm the reckoning."

BOOM.

Fire and dust ripped through the room.

My friends reacted instantly.

Archie rocketed forward, flames roaring. "YOU'RE NOT TOYING WITH HIM!"

Olsen grounded himself, earth buckling. "Uh—maybe let's NOT die today?!"

Prince lightning-sprinted, feathers crackling. "This guy's insane!"

Demaurion surged with water. "FOCUS! CONTROL IT—DON'T GET OBLITERATED!"

Teachers screamed. Cafeteria staff panicked.

"MOVE!"

"FIRE EXTINGUISHER!"

"MY MEATLOAF—MY MEATLOAF!"

And still—Dark Don moved like a predator untouched by panic. Every step exact. Every strike final. Lunar Lance humming. Gravity bending beneath his feet.

He flicked a finger.

Silver chains snapped into existence—wrapping around me, Olsen, Prince, Archie, and Demaurion. Lunar energy bindings

crushed tight.

Prince struggled, wings sparking. "YOU SERIOUS?!"

"Why did you have to ask that," Dark Don muttered.

Something drifted down from above.

A scroll.

Old. Frayed. Glowing faintly like it didn't belong to time anymore.

He caught it midair without looking. Then he looked.

He read.

Slowly.

Too slowly.

"Oh," he said at last, voice flat. "So it's already written."

Demaurion snarled, stepping forward, water boiling off his scales.

"GET US OUT. NOW."

Dark Don didn't answer him.

His eyes were on me.

On *us*.

On the prophecy.

He raised one hand—and clenched it.

The scroll shuddered.

Lunar energy flared around his fingers, white and violent, veins of silver lightning crawling up his arm as he pulled.

It screamed.

The parchment bent. Warped. The words flickered like they were alive and fighting back.

Dark Don growled low in his chest and pulled harder.

Nothing.

The prophecy wouldn't rip.

For the first time since I'd known him—

Dark Don froze.

"...No," he whispered.

He tried again.

Harder.

The room shook. Tables lifted off the ground. Trays slammed into walls. The air itself fractured with sound as lunar power surged like it meant to erase reality out of spite.

Still nothing.

The prophecy held.

Dark Don's breathing changed.

Sharp. Uneven.

Annoyed... and something else.

He dropped the scroll.

It hovered for a second—then snapped back into place, floating calmly like it had *won*.

His eyes snapped to me.

Pure white.

"This was supposed to end here," he said quietly.

He walked toward me.

Each step felt like gravity doubling.

Mr. Bassi lunged forward. "Hey—HEY—!"

Dark Don didn't even look at him.

"Great," Mr. Bassi muttered. "How am I explaining THIS to the principal—"

I grabbed the stair railing, wings flaring instinctively as Dark Don stopped right in front of me.

So close I could feel the heat of his energy.

He raised his hand.

Lunar light condensed around his fingers—tight, sharp, final.

This was it.

I braced.

His hand twitched.

Just barely.

His jaw clenched.

Something crossed his face—fast, ugly, unwanted.

"...Tch."

He lowered his hand.

The energy dispersed like it had been embarrassed to exist.

Dark Don looked away from me, eyes narrowing as if *I* was the problem for still breathing.

"You're in the way," he said. Not angry. Almost... irritated with himself.

Demaurion stared. "What?"

Dark Don snapped his fingers.

"Snap."

A white hole tore open in the cafeteria, energy screaming as space folded in on itself. Wind howled. Tables ripped free. Trays and chairs spiraled into the light.

"You'll be out," Dark Don said. "All of you."

I stared at him. "Why?"

He didn't answer right away.

Then, quietly—too quietly—

"Because finishing this here feels... wrong."

He turned back to me, eyes sharp again, walls firmly rebuilt.

"You have a job to do," he said. "Now go."

He flicked his finger.

The shockwave hit like a god slamming a door.

"DAMN ITTT—!"

White swallowed everything.

✧ #1.2 — Welcome to Scarletsville ✧

The ground didn't welcome us.

We hit hard, hard enough that the impact rattled through my skull and knocked the air clean out of my chest. Dirt exploded upward. Gravel scraped my cheek. Heat followed immediately, thick and suffocating, like the land itself had leaned down to remind me I didn't belong here.

I lay there for a second longer than I should've.

My body refused to cooperate. Every muscle burned. My lungs clawed for air like they were trying to escape my ribs. When I finally groaned, it sounded pathetic, even to me.

Slowly, I pushed myself up.

The world tilted. I squeezed my eyes shut, waited for the spinning to calm, then opened them again.

Red stone surrounded us on all sides, towering canyon walls, sharp and uneven, like the jagged remains of something that had been torn apart. Above, the sky churned in shades of burnt orange and dirty brown. Clouds drifted lazily across a sun that looked tired of shining here.

The heat lived here.

I staggered toward the edge of the canyon, boots sliding in loose dust. One wrong step and...

My stomach dropped.

Far below, molten rivers cut through the canyon floor, glowing and bubbling as they crawled through the rock. Lava hissed and popped, lighting the shadows with a violent orange pulse. The earth was furious.

"...Where... where the hell are we?" I whispered.

The heat shimmered around me, warping the air. And then it clicked.

Dark Don.

That smug, lunar menace had tossed us here like we were nothing more than debris.

Groans sounded behind me.

Olsen pushed himself upright, hoodie stained with ash and dirt. He followed my gaze over the edge, went quiet for a beat, then huffed a shaky laugh.

"Bro..." he said slowly, "...we might actually be in hell."

Prince popped up next, way too fast, arms flailing as he spun in a circle.

"VOLCANO?! ARE WE LIVING ON A GIANT COOKIE OF LAVA?!"

Demaurion rose last, shoulders tense, smoke faintly curling from his nostrils as he took everything in.

"WHY," he snarled, "DOES THIS LOOK LIKE SATAN'S BACK-YARD?"

Archie snapped his wings open, feathers glowing faintly as irritation sparked in his eyes.

"It's Scarletsville, not Satan-ville, grumpy."

I didn't join in.

I sank down near the cliff's edge, knees drawn up, staring into the molten rivers below like they might blink back and explain this nightmare.

And then it hit me.

The prophecy.

Dark Don.

The scroll.

Everything collided in my head at once, heavy and unavoidable.

"Celestial's Fight," I murmured.

Five sets of eyes turned to me. Blank. Confused.

Before I could explain, a sharp metallic scrape sliced through the canyon.

Every instinct screamed.

We froze.

Olsen's posture shifted instantly, casual gone.

"That's... not natural," he said quietly. "Stay sharp. And, uh, maybe don't trip into the lava."

Prince leaned forward, grin stretching way too wide.

"Or, or we jump in and see if lava is actually warm chocolate pudding. Science."

Demaurion's tail lashed once.

"Prince," he growled, "shut your ass up before I throw you in myself."

Archie laughed, wings twitching.

"Oh, I'd pay to see that."

Demaurion turned slowly.

"You," he said flatly, "are asking for it."

Before I could react, Demaurion lunged.

He grabbed Archie by the neck and yanked him off the ground.

"O-oh... oh oh oh okay... OKAY!" Archie yelped, wings flailing wildly.

"QUIT SQUIRMING," Demaurion snapped. "LOCK IN, FIERY BITCH."

"D-Dem, c'mon! It's a joke!" Archie gasped, trying and failing to twist free.

"STAY STILL."

With a sharp shove, Archie stumbled sideways, barely catching himself before slipping in the dust. He swung back weakly, more reflex than threat.

Demaurion caught his arm mid-swing like it was nothing.

"Fucking Flamenite audacity," he muttered.

He hoisted Archie up for half a second, just long enough to make the point, then slammed him onto the ground.

Dust puffed up. Archie groaned, sprawled out, wings twitching, smoke curling from his nostrils.

"...Fine," he wheezed. "Fine. I give up."

I rushed over, hands raised.

"HEY, cut it out! Both of you! This is not the time!"

Demaurion straightened, breathing heavy, then finally loosened his grip.

"Maybe," he said coldly, "if you stopped testing me, we'd survive this canyon in one piece."

Archie sat up slowly, rubbing his shoulder, smirk creeping back despite everything.

"Yeah... noted."

I shot them both a look.

"Can we focus on not getting roasted alive instead of wrestling?"

Demaurion huffed, Archie muttered something under his breath. Somewhere behind me, Prince was absolutely laughing.

I turned back toward the cliff and stared into the lava again.

And once more, clarity crashed into me.

Prophecy.

Dark Don.

The scroll.

"Celestial's Fight," I whispered.

Nobody answered.

The valley went silent.

Then...

SKRRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAPE.

The sound ripped across the cliffs.

It sounded like a sword dragging across the bones of the world itself.

Every head snapped toward the noise.

The mountains trembled.

Dust rolled down the cliff faces.

Even the lava rivers bubbling through the valley seemed to hesitate.

Then a massive shadow emerged from behind a jagged rock formation.

THOOM.

THOOM.

THOOM.

Each footstep shook the ground.

King Scar stepped into view.

The Flamenite Warlord.

His armor looked forged from dried blood and volcanic steel. Deep cracks glowed across the metal like magma trapped beneath the surface. His tattered cape dragged behind him, smoldering as if fire itself feared touching it.

A gigantic sword rested on his shoulder.

The blade wasn't burning.

It wasn't molten.

It was something far worse.

The metal itself looked angry.

Heat waves twisted reality around it.

The air screamed.

Nobody moved.

Nobody breathed.

Nobody blinked.

Because every instinct in my body was screaming the exact same thing.

Run.

"Do you see that mark?" Archie whispered.

His voice cracked.

"I see it," Olsen muttered.

"I hate it."

"Also hate it," Demaurion agreed.

Prince nodded rapidly.

"Yep. Hate everything about this."

Scar stopped.

Slowly.

His helmet tilted downward.

Looking at us.

"Get out of this barren wasteland or else..." he scraped the sword against a nearby rock. "Somebody's gonna lose their head."

We all turned and blinked at each other, not saying a word as the red fog drifted past us.

Until one of us decided not to shut up.

"Sooooo, anybody tryna die today?" Prince asked, glancing at King Scar every other second. "I'm not."

"I'm not either, bro," we all said in sync, glancing at King Scar while waiting for him to actually do something.

I slowly pointed a finger at him.

"Are you... supposed to do something?"

"Well, YEAH!" shouted Scar, his sword igniting with flames. "Not until you guys do something first!"

"So what are we supposed to do?" Archie asked, raising an eyebrow. "I mean, you're the monster. You're supposed to attack us first, right? Since you're all big and scary and stuff. Heh heh..."

"But—" Olsen stepped forward before Scar could answer. "How about we make this an actual fair fight? You let us win, then you fall on the ground and cry like a little baby while we kick your ass."

He turned toward us with a grin.

"How does that sound?"

We all threw our fists into the air.

"SOUNDS GREAT!"

It was all sunshine and rainbows until King Scar actually charged.

His sword erupted with fire as he swung.

Instantly, all of us jumped into action.

Energy ignited around every one of us.

I dropped low, one hand touching the ground and my other fist pulled behind me as I stared up at King Scar, my expression finally serious.

"OH HE'S REALLY TRYING!"

Olsen launched himself straight into the air.

Straight at Scar.

Scar caught him by the neck.

Then slammed him into the ground hard enough to shake the entire canyon.

BOOM!

Dust exploded outward.

"DAMN!" Olsen shouted. "WHY IS HE HOLDING ONTO MY NECK THAT HARD?!"

Scar hurled him across the battlefield.

Olsen smashed through a structure, tore through a wall, and rolled across the dirt.

Prince's head snapped toward Olsen.

Then toward Scar.

Blue lightning crackled to life around his body.

"YOU NEVER MESS WITH THE BIG GUY!"

CRACK-BOOM!

Prince exploded forward at breakneck speed, lightning streaking behind him.

He leaped.

Big mistake.

Scar swatted him out of the air like a fly.

Prince nearly flew off the edge of the canyon before tumbling across the ground. He caught himself, staggered upright, and wiped blood from his mouth.

"Damn... he really does hit that hard."

BOOM!

Archie's flaming foot slammed into Scar's chest.

The explosion roared through the canyon and finally forced Scar back a step.

Olsen got back up and immediately fired a barrage of earth pellets.

The stone projectiles whistled through the air and hammered against Scar's armor.

CLANG!

CLANG!

CLANG!

The impacts forced him to stumble.

"RIGHT THERE!"

I launched into the sky, celestial energy blazing around my fists.

Scar twisted.

The second I reached him, his flaming sword drove into my gut.

BOOOOM!

The explosion launched me across the canyon.

I hit the ground.

Rolled.

Bounced.

Rolled again.

Meanwhile, Demaurion fired a blast of water directly at Scar's sword.

Steam burst into the air.

The flames weakened for a second.

Demaurion smirked.

"Huh. I'm pretty impressed with myself today—"

"WOAHHHHHHH!"

A torrent of fire erupted from Scar's sword.

Demaurion barely leaped out of the way as the flames swept beneath him.

He flipped through the air and landed on a boulder before firing a concentrated blast of high-pressure water straight at Scar's face.

"GLALBOBLOBLAOBLAOBLBOABLBLADDA!!!"

King Scar roared as water flooded directly into his mouth.

I blasted in from behind.

Prince flickered beside me in a burst of lightning.

"Wanna hit him at the same time?"

Archie flew alongside us.

"I'M GONNA DO A BIG BOOM BOOM!"

Olsen sprinted forward too as layers of rock wrapped around his fists and forearms.

"OH THIS IS GONNA HURT!"

I pointed toward Demaurion.

"DEMAURION! KEEP BLASTING HIM WITH WATER!"

"GOT IT!"

The water pressure intensified.

Blood even started spraying from the corners of Scar's mouth.

I charged celestial energy into my fist.

Olsen tightened his rocky gauntlets.

Prince packed his fists with hundreds of volts of electricity.

Archie ignited both hands with blazing fire.

We all reeled back our fists.

Then charged at the same time.

"FINISHING BLOW!!!"

Scar turned.

And we all punched him at once.

Which was something we were about to regret.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

The explosion swallowed the battlefield.

We threw our arms over our faces and crouched low as hurricane-force winds blasted through the canyon.

When the smoke cleared, Scar shot through the air and dropped straight into the lava ocean below.

PLOP!

Honestly?

It was a pretty satisfying plop.

I slowly walked toward the edge of the canyon and looked down.

The lava bubbled violently as Scar's distant screaming echoed through it.

The rest of the guys joined me.

For a moment, none of us said anything.

We just stared at each other like we hadn't accidentally killed the King of the Flamenites.

A grin spread across my face.

"Eh," I said with a shrug. "We'll be alright."

"Well," I said, "guess we keep moving." The heat was relentless, but the wind had finally died down to a bearable breeze. We dragged our bodies across Scarletsville, passing by red spires of rock while the sun tortured us with its insane heat. The clouds were in sheets of smoke, the sky was on fire. While trudging, we stepped foot in a village.

We all stopped. My eyes shot around the place of what they called "a Kingdom".

We saw multiple Flamenites wandering around, holding baskets of orange fruit. Some women and little girls wore red or orange robes, the men never wore anything for their upper-bodies but wore ragged baggy pants in crimson. Thankfully nobody recognized me.

Houses of large red and orange rocks with swirly patterns were visible in the area. There were at least hundreds of them in the village.

There were two muscular men with phoenix wings, holding a red glass of lava. Sipping it altogether, they fist bumped. Flamenite lemur kids ran around, playing with a molten ball. They hopped from different spires, throwing the molten ball at each other to catch it. This is the Scarletsville Kingdom.

Far ahead was towering, looming. It was red and shining with every fragment of metal as its tip pierced the sky. With many towers collided with it, Flamenite dragons flew around it holding fiery spears and flaming armor.

That was King Scars castle.

This town was very busy, and they don't know that I was

the one that dropped their king into lava and killed him. We continued traveling. Passing molten rivers that gushed with glowing lava, sauntering through the Crimson Canyons. Wide canyons where the Flamenite felines. Flamenite Lions, Tigers, and Leopards roared at us while we walked. Archie warned us that they were pretty rude. And trust me, I would've slapped the fire out of all of those creatures if they repeated those actions.

The valley was flat and cracked beneath our feet, barren and broken. Massive red mountains loomed, rugged and streaked with veins of molten lava. The river we crossed was nothing but blackened, coal-covered rocks sliding beneath our shoes.

The whole place was a surreal mix of devastation and haunting beauty, frozen in perpetual ruin.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, shadows stretched long across the land. The fiery sky faded to darkness, and the first stars blinked awake—distant memories scattered across the night.

The crescent moon hung low, casting an eerie silver glow over the desolation. Night swallowed everything, bringing a silence so thick it felt like the earth itself was holding its breath. "I'm starting to think this place is even scarier when the sun's gone," Archie muttered, breaking the quiet.

Squinting into the darkness, he added, "It's late, and I'm beat. How about we find a spot to crash? We can push on fresh tomorrow and tackle the next part of the prophecy." I nodded slowly. "Sounds good. Rest first, then move on."

Olsen, always thinking ahead, spotted a small cave nestled into a rocky hillside. Perfect shelter. The cave was pitch black, darker than the night outside.

Everyone shifted into their magical beast forms, taking up spots in the cool shadows. I sat at the entrance, folding my

wings like a blanket around me. From here, the sky stretched endlessly—a canvas of twinkling stars.

The crescent moon hung like a silent guardian, bathing the world in soft silver light. Olsen, now a massive Rockslide Ankylosaurus, lay on his belly, filling much of the cave's floor. He turned his head toward me, a thoughtful smirk playing on his lips. "You ever notice how Scarletsville looks kinda beautiful at night, but during the day... it's a whole different story?"

"Yeah," I replied. "Like two different worlds. We'll probably find out why tomorrow." I leaned back, wrapping my wings tighter around myself. My tail curled around my waist, warmth radiating as I nestled into the folds. One last glance at the moonlit sky... then sleep took me.

✧ #1.3 — Scarletsville Shenanigans ✧

I yawned and stretched out on the rocky ground, my wings snapping back into place behind me like they were auditioning for the world's most dramatic entrance.

Don't start.

Yes, I sleep with my wings out. Celestianite thing. Saves gold on blankets.

The cave buzzed as everyone woke up.

Of course, Olsen couldn't just rise quietly like a civilized creature.

He yawned so loud the walls trembled.

Dust shook loose from the ceiling and drifted down around us.

I stared at him. Flat. Unamused.

"Was that necessary?"

He shrugged and shifted into his bulky Ankylosaurus form, stone plates clanking against each other.

"Earthnites gotta Earthnite."

I peeked outside.

The sky was already boiling into that cursed red-orange soup again. Heat slammed into my face like the planet personally hated me. Volcanoes rumbled in the distance, sounding irritated, like they hadn't had caffeine yet.

Ash drifted through the air in lazy spirals.

The entire horizon shimmered beneath the heat.

Out there, Vexes prowled the ash flats.

Skinny.

Four-legged.

All head, all teeth.

No eyes.

No nose.

Just vibes and violence.

One of them skittered across a ridge before disappearing behind a wall of black rock.

I smiled.

"Cool. Daywalkers."

The squad regrouped.

Half-awake.

Fully annoyed.

Nobody looked happy to be alive in Scarletsville.

First objective: get off this molten nightmare and reach the next island without dying horribly.

"Where to?" I asked, pulling out the map.

"North," Olsen said, squinting like the horizon owed him money.

I followed his gaze.

Nothing but mountains, lava flows, and enough volcanic rock to build ten thousand castles.

Then—

Twotwoot.

My dragon ears twitched.

That's bad.

That's very bad.

"You guys hear that?" I asked.

They shook their heads.

Great.

Love being the only one with paranoia and ears.

Twotwoot.

Again.

Louder this time.

Some unholy screech-roar that sounded like a cat and a T-Rex were beefing in a metal band.

The sound echoed through the valleys before fading into the distance.

I spun around, tail wagging before my brain could stop it.

"We should absolutely investigate."

Scarletsville stretched out before us.

Endless scorched valleys.

Lava dripping down cliffs like the world's worst faucet.

The air tasted like smoke, ash, and poor life choices.

We climbed out from the cave and made our way toward the sound.

At the bottom of a steep hill stood a glowing blue figure, crackling with energy.

Eyes blazing.

Knuckles cracking.

Final-boss posture.

Prince squinted.

"Isn't that... Power?"

My brain detonated.

That.

Is.

Power Zenith.

THE Power Zenith.

The legend.

The blueprint.

The reason the Power Gems even exist.

I grabbed a flat rock, hopped on it like a hoverboard, and launched down the hill.

Ash sprayed behind me.

The rock bounced over cracks and jagged stone while I drifted around bends like I actually knew what I was doing.

At the bottom, I backflipped off and flicked the rock away like that had been intentional the entire time.

Power turned and smiled.

"Well, well. If it isn't Don. Remember me?"

My soul left my body and did a lap.

POWER Z.

The OG.

The absolute GOAT of Avangard.

I grabbed his hand and shook it like I'd found the last slice of pizza and it was still warm.

"It's an honor. I'm your biggest fan. You're actually here. I—"

"Easy," Power laughed. "Breathe, kid."

My face went nuclear red.

"Right. Sorry. Normal. I'm being normal."

"Fanboy alert," Olsen called from the hill.

Archie tilted his head.

"This guy's the top hero? You're this obsessed with him?"

I stared at Archie like he'd just said two plus two was spaghetti.

"HOW do you not know him? He saved over a hundred people in the Leviathan raid. Literal. Living. GOAT."

Demaurion crossed his arms.

"Fantastic. History lesson over. We still have a prophecy."

I sighed, smoke puffing from my nostrils.

"Yeah. Let's do the save-the-world thing before more villains

smell us."

Prince studied the map.

"Next stop: Gadian Sea. And we're not even close!"

He flipped it upside down.

Paused.

"Oh. Never mind. I was reading it wrong."

"We're south of Scarletsville," I said, pointing. "Near the Pyramids of Markilao. Water's that way."

Back at the cave, Power's expression finally shifted.

The relaxed smile faded.

His attention sharpened.

The joking was over.

"So," I said, "Celestianites and Lunaranites are beefing over the Lost Key. Lunaranites want control. Celestianites want peace. And us. Me, Olsen, Prince, Archie, Demaurion. We're supposed to stop the apocalypse."

Power nodded.

"Yep. Long fight, no breaks, no vacation."

Then he smirked.

"But I think you kids can handle it."

FIVE MINUTES LATER

For hours.

We trained.

No joke, we trained hard.

Muscles screamed. Sweat poured like rivers. Every now and then somebody cracked a joke, and we'd all laugh for a second before remembering we were technically trying to stop the apocalypse.

Archie was trying to breathe fire without torching his own eyebrows off.

Spoiler: he looked like a crispy chicken nugget by the end.

The tips of his feathers were singed black, and every few minutes he'd pat them down while pretending nothing happened.

Olsen was grunting like a grizzly bear with a grudge, slamming boulders into the dirt like the world owed him something.

Every impact sent tremors through the training ground. Half the time he looked less like he was training and more like he was trying to personally intimidate the planet.

Prince?

Dude was basically a human bullet.

He zipped around so fast even his own shadow struggled to keep up. Every few seconds a yellow blur shot past somebody's face before vanishing again.

Demaurion was over there summoning water with all the finesse of a kid who just learned to pour a glass.

Unfortunately, that meant accidentally dousing Olsen's face more times than anyone could count.

"MY BAD!"

"THAT'S THE FIFTH TIME!"

"I SAID MY BAD!"

And me?

I was chasing my celestial energy like it was a hyperactive cat hiding in a tree.

Sometimes I caught it.

Sometimes I faceplanted.

Sometimes I looked like I was performing an interpretive dance called *The Consequences of My Actions.*

Power watched from a distance with his arms crossed.

The longer he watched, the bigger the smirk on his face became.

Finally, he pushed off a nearby rock and walked over.

"Alright, Don," he said. "Let's talk daggers."

My eyes lit up like I'd just won a free pizza.

"Daggers? You mean these spirally things?"

I pulled out the pair of sleek, humming Celestial Daggers Power had forged himself.

"You called them 'spirally things.' They're daggers."

I twirled them around and examined the glowing blades.

"Spirally equals spirally. They look spirally, so I'll call them spirally things."

Power sighed.

"Yup. They're your new best friends."

I grinned immediately.

For about three seconds, I imagined myself slicing through enemies like some legendary shadow ninja.

Power's smirk twisted.

"But here's the catch. Daggers aren't about brute force. They're about speed, precision, and control. You've got the speed part down."

He pointed one finger directly at me.

"Your precision? Not so much."

Oof.

That hit like a bucket of ice water.

"Okay, wise guy. What do I do then?"

Power clapped his hands.

The clearing suddenly filled with glowing blue figures.

Short.

Flickering.

Humanoid.

They looked like holograms that had crawled out of a training simulator.

"Meet the Shadow Patriots," Power said. "They're tough, fast, and relentless."

One of them immediately dashed sideways.
Another crouched low.
A third cracked its knuckles.
"Perfect practice dummies."
I pointed at them.
"They don't look very dummy-ish."
"Your job is to slash them all down in thirty seconds."
I stared at him.
"Thirty seconds?!"
Power folded his arms.
"Ready?"
"No."
"Go."
The Shadow Patriots exploded into motion.
I lunged forward with both daggers flashing.
Immediately missed.
A Patriot slipped around my strike.
Another ducked beneath a slash.
A third jumped over my head.
"HEY!"
I spun around and swung wildly.
Missed again.
Time slipped away faster than my dignity.
Thirty seconds later, every Shadow Patriot was still standing.
Power shook his head.
"Again."
The second attempt somehow went worse.
One Patriot literally sidestepped me.
Just sidestepped.
That hurt emotionally.
"Again."

Third try.

I slowed down.

Breathed.

Focused.

The first Shadow Patriot disappeared beneath a clean slash.

The second got caught during a pivot.

The third fell after a quick spin.

For the first time, things started clicking.

My movements felt tighter.

Cleaner.

More deliberate.

Power nodded.

"Better."

We ran the drill again.

And again.

And again.

Each round ended faster than the last.

The Shadows blinked out one after another.

My arms ached.

Sweat burned my eyes.

My legs felt like jelly.

But I finally understood.

Precision wasn't about hitting harder.

It was about hitting exactly where you meant to.

"See?" Power said. "Daggers demand agility. You've got to be light on your feet. Fluid."

Agility.

That word stuck in my head.

Immediately, I thought back to one of my favorite moves as a kid.

Wing Jump.

Using my wings to boost my jump height and launch myself way higher than I should've been able to.

"Show me your Wing Jump."

I blinked.

"Uh... right now?"

"Right now."

I spread my wings.

Crouched low.

Then launched.

The ground cracked beneath my boots.

My wings snapped open at exactly the right moment.

The world dropped away beneath me.

Wind roared across my scales.

For a brief second, I felt weightless.

Higher.

Higher.

Higher.

I reached the peak and looked down.

Everyone looked tiny.

Even Power seemed impressed.

When I landed, dust exploded around my feet.

Power nodded.

"Good."

A grin spread across my face.

"Really?"

"Really."

I tried not to look too proud.

Failed immediately.

Power pointed at my daggers.

"Now combine that with your dagger work. Speed. Precision. Agility."

I spun one dagger around my finger.

"So basically daggers and flying ninja moves."

"Basically."

I grinned.

"I'm unstoppable now."

Power laughed.

"Slow your roll, kid. You're just getting started."

The training continued for hours.

I practiced dagger strikes.

Dodged attacks.

Wove through Shadow Patriots.

Jumped higher.

Moved faster.

Fell on my face.

Repeatedly.

Every mistake taught me something.

Every failure sharpened me.

Every success made me hungry for the next one.

And honestly?

That was the best part.

I could feel myself getting better.

Not instantly.

Not magically.

Actually better.

By midday, we finally headed back into the cave.

Training had drained every last drop of sweat and fire from our bodies.

Nobody looked eager to move anymore.

Even Prince had slowed down.

That alone was terrifying.

I sat down and stared at my hands.

The question had been bouncing around my head for hours.

Eventually, I couldn't ignore it anymore.

"Why are they fighting over one thing?"

Olsen shot me a look like I'd completely lost it.

"You serious? Lunaranites want to take over Avangard."

"No, I mean why though?" I asked. "What even started all this?"

The cave grew quieter.

Power's confident grin faded.

He glanced downward.

For the first time all day, he looked older.

More tired.

"Alright," he said quietly.

He leaned back against the cave wall.

"Time for a little history lesson."

Origin Story of — King Dreadixz

Dreadixz was never meant for ordinary.

From the very beginning, his hunger for power felt unnatural, like a void that couldn't be filled, only expanded. While others lived within the structure of Celestia, he rejected it entirely. Even as a miner in its depths, he wasn't just working. He was watching. Thinking.

Waiting.

He didn't just want strength.

He wanted authority.

Control.

A throne high enough to stand above even the stars.

And above all else... he wanted what King Vigilzante had.

Vigilzante was everything Dreadixz wasn't: respected, untouchable, a ruler crowned in legacy and balance. While Dreadixz carved through stone and shadow, Vigilzante ruled with effortless

dominance.

Every word of praise toward the king felt like an insult.

Every moment under his rule felt like suffocation.

It wasn't admiration.

It was hatred.

The Lunaranites during this time were already intelligent, capable of thought, loyalty, and decision. But they had no true ruler. No unifying force. They lived scattered, divided, without purpose beyond survival and instinct.

Dreadixz saw that weakness immediately.

Not as something to fix... but something to exploit.

Everything changed the day he found it.

The Lost Key.

It didn't glow.

It didn't speak.

It didn't choose.

It simply existed. Ancient, silent, and absolute.

And Dreadixz understood something no one else did.

It wasn't meant to judge.

It was meant to be used.

When he took the Key, nothing stopped him. No force pushed back. No destiny intervened. The power within it bent to his will, and with it, Dreadixz elevated himself beyond anything the Lunaranites had ever seen.

Not by changing them...

But by proving he was above them.

Through sheer power and presence, he unified the Lunaranites under a single command.

Not through kindness.

Not through leadership.

Through dominance.

Through fear.

Through undeniable strength.

And just like that...

He became their king.

Not by birth.

Not by right.

But because no one could challenge him.

With an army behind him, Dreadixz carved out his own dominion, ruling a vast portion of what was once Celestia. But time itself re-shaped the world. The land fractured, broken apart by natural ocean patterns, collapsing into a single, isolated continent: Foreshade.

A land drowned in shadow, a kingdom built on control.

And from there... Dreadixz ruled.

But even with power, territory, and an entire people beneath him, it still wasn't enough. Because Vigilzante still stood, still representing everything Dreadixz despised: balance, order, peace.

To Dreadixz, those were flaws, illusions that kept the world weak. His hatred evolved into something far greater than jealousy, it became belief, a vision of reality where the world itself was the problem.

Why rule a broken system...

When you could erase it completely?

Dreadixz sought a world where he would be the only one left to rule, just silence, and absolute control.

He spread this ideology across Foreshade, shaping the Lunaranites into something far more dangerous than a kingdom: a force.

A unified belief that the world didn't deserve to exist as it was.

That it needed to be destroyed, or purified.

And when the time came, Dreadixz rose fully as the King of the Lunaranites, the Shadow Lord, and declared his true goal: Annihilation.

The complete destruction of the world itself so that, from its ashes, he and the Lunaranites could rule in eternal silence.

And at the center of it all, the Lost Key remained. Power that Dreadixz had already claimed once, and would use again to finish what he started.

No matter who tried to stop him.

Power's voice dropped as he finished.

"That's why Dreadixz and the Lunaranites want the Key. Vengeance. Power. Control."

I lowered my gaze.

"Damn... I get it now."

The cave was dead silent except for a slow drip... drip... drip echoing somewhere deep inside. My breath puffed into little clouds. It was cold enough to freeze a dragon sneeze.

I dug into my pocket and pulled out this old, crinkled scroll.

"Okay, so uh... I may or may not have found this thing back at school," I said, unrolling it carefully.

Prince leaned in, "Bro, that was in your pocket this whole time?!"

Olsen blinked, "Wait, you mean we almost got eaten by Scar and you had the legendary scroll of destiny in your jeans?"

"...It wasn't exactly labelled that, Olsen," I muttered.

Archie squinted at it, "You sure that's not just your grocery list or something?"

Power shot everyone a sharp look, "Quiet."

The glow from the runes flared as he took the scroll from my hands, his eyes scanning the ancient Celestianite symbols.

His voice dropped as he began to read, "Celestial's Fight, Earth's Might, Lightning's Surge, Flame's Burns..."

As he spoke, the words rippled through the air, lighting up the

cave walls with golden light. The energy felt ancient, like the cave itself was listening.

When he finished, the last line echoed like a whisper in the dark, "'His place as King of the Celestianites will be found'."

The glow faded, leaving us in eerie silence.

Olsen scratched his head, "That... sounded kinda royal. Like you're about to get a crown or something."

Prince grinned, "Your Majesty, would you like to hold your shiny crown? Because even the ones that fold under their breath deserve to be a king."

He made this dramatic kneeling motion before instantly slipping on a rock.

"AH!"

"Stop," I started, snickering. "You look like a broken swan."

Power didn't laugh.

He slowly rolled the scroll back up, his eyes never leaving me.

"It's not a joke."

The air got heavier.

"That line, 'Shall he ascend and claim his name,' isn't just prophecy fluff. It means you, Don, are destined to become the next King of the Celestianites."

My smile dropped instantly, "...Huh?"

"King," Power repeated, his tone dead serious. "Celestia hasn't had one since the old empire fell. This prophecy says you'll take the Celestial Throne when the trials are complete."

My wings twitched, "King? Bro, I can barely wake up on time. You think I can run an entire species?"

Prince snorted, "So what, we gotta start calling you 'Your Majesty' now?"

"Do it and I'm kicking you into a portal," I warned, glaring.

Olsen crossed his arms, "Well, guess that means we're guard-

ing royalty now."

Prince grinned again, "Nah, I'm still calling him 'King Celestianite Dragon of the Divine Tribe Lens Donnerton the Absolute III,' with fancy violin music playing in the background."

He took a deep breath, then let out a high-pitched:

"DODODODO DOO DOO—"

"PRINCE!" I snapped, wings flaring.

"DON'T HURT ME PLEASE I DON'T KNOW PRINCE!" he squeaked, ducking behind Olsen.

Power sighed, shaking his head, "Children of prophecy, definitely..."

Suddenly, the cave trembled. The ground groaned beneath our feet. Rocks rattled and fell around us.

We bolted out, adrenaline snapping through our veins.

From the depths of the canyon, something stirred.

The wind screamed. The earth cracked and split.

"WATCH OUT!" I yelled, leaping back.

Everyone scattered as the ground ruptured, revealing a river of glowing lava below.

Then—oh no.

From the molten river rose a massive lava golem, its rocky body veined with molten orange fire. Its eyes blazed with fury as it let out a monstrous roar—a terrifying blend of T-Rex and Leviathan.

I drew my daggers, heart pounding.

"WHAT THE HECK IS THAT?!" Olsen shouted.

I narrowed my eyes.

"That's Scar. Thought we killed him. Guess we forgot—he can evolve., and survive under lava"

The titan loomed over us, bigger than any skyscraper in New York, a living volcano of rage and molten power.

Celestial energy sparked across my skin, crackling like lightning in a storm.

"Let's just hope we survive this fight..." I muttered.

"FIGHT? DON, ARE YOU OUT OF YOUR MIND?!" Olsen screeched. "That thing is massive! And we're nowhere near full power!"

I turned, fire blazing in my eyes.

"Olsen... we're the Five Chosen Ones. That means we do whatever it takes to fulfill the prophecy. All of it. If we die, we die. But I'm not backing down. We beat this guy... or we die trying."

Olsen blinked, then smirked. "Then let's kick some magma butt."

Without hesitation, we all launched ourselves at Scar. I whipped out my Celestial Daggers, adrenaline pumping through my veins.

The monster let out a roar so loud it cracked the skies. Then—BOOM—he fired a lava beam straight at us.

I screamed into the wind, determination in every breath. We charged forward—

And just as we reached his arms, he slammed them down like thunder.

But Power was already on it. He flew above me like a meteor and punched the lava right out of Scar's arm! Rocks exploded in every direction. He then zipped to Scar's face like a bullet and landed two massive punches right into his skull. The beast roared in pain.

I launched into the air, wings spread wide, dodging magma blasts like some kind of galactic fly. Olsen slammed his hammer into the ground, triggering a quake.

"NICE ONE!" I shouted from above. But then—WHAM!—Scar

grabbed me in one of his massive, crusty lava hands and flung me toward a blazing mountain.

Before I could even yell, Power zoomed in, grabbed me mid-air, spun around, and *yeeted* me like a celestial cannonball.

"GO GET 'EM, BOY!" he yelled.

I landed hard on Scar's arm, the heat nearly cooking me alive. The rocks were huge and hot, and he was about to squash me with the other arm—until Prince flew in, lightning crackling off his wings.

He snagged me with electric tendrils and hurled me toward the beast's face.

I charged up every ounce of energy I had.

"CELESTIAL DEVASTATION!!"

I crashed my fists into Scar's face, unleashing a massive celestial shockwave that made the skies ripple.

Falling fast, I braced for impact—until Archie, in his full Phoenix Beast form, swooped in and caught me on his back.

"Thanks for the lift!" I shouted. He nodded and zoomed past Scar, unloading fireballs like a blazing machine gun.

I stood on his back. "GO!" Archie called. I jumped off and soared with my wings again, landing on Scar's raised arm.

I stabbed my daggers in and started *skiing down his arm like a legend.* Lava burst from his wounds like soda from a shaken bottle. I reached his shoulder and leapt into the air, daggers crossed, celestial energy flaring.

"TAKE THIS!" I slashed through his face like a cosmic shooting star.

Landing on his other arm, I started skiing backwards this time, pulling off a slick drift. "Huh, guess you're not that powerful after all," I smirked.

Then somehow, the beast *flung me off* into the air. I was now

falling, flailing my arms as I looked down from the sky.

Then I remembered the chains.

"CELESTIAL CHAINS, ACTIVATE!" I yelled mid-air.

Nothing. I was falling fast, clothes flapping, energy tendrils whipping in the wind.

"JUST AIM AT SOMETHING!" Power shouted.

"HOW DO I AIM?!" I yelled back.

"DUNNO—JUST POINT!"

So I pointed at a mountain. The chains fired like missiles and dragged me to the top. Scar tried swiping at me, but I was too fast.

Standing on the summit, I turned to Scar and—yes—I started dancing.

"Come on, Scarry Scar! You want this?! Shake that tail!"

Scar was NOT amused. He screamed, slapped the mountain, and lava exploded everywhere. I went flying into the air with chunks of molten rock chasing me.

"HELP!" I shouted.

Scar caught me midair and slammed me through a whole mountain.

I tumbled with the collapsing rocks, pain ripping through every bone.

"DON!" Prince yelled.

Olsen rushed over, pulling boulders off me. I was out cold.

Blood everywhere. My tail dimmed to deep blue.

I gasped, "We're in trouble..."

Scar began charging a lava beam at us. A glowing sphere formed in his hands.

"We might as well lose now..."

"WHAT?!" Olsen shouted. "NO! WE'RE NOT GIVING UP!"

He grabbed my shoulder, shaking me.

"Remember what you said?! 'It's do or die!' Well, Don—you promised *do,* not *die.* You've lost again and again—and you still stand up! Why? Because you're YOU! You're the Chosen One! You have the most powerful element! The most insane skills! You are Lens Don, THE FREAKING CELESTIANITE!!!"

I smiled faintly.

"...Right."

Archie lowered me to the ground. I forced myself up, gripping my arm. Energy began to crackle...

I drew my Celestial Daggers tight, took a deep breath, and locked eyes with Scar.

No flashy transformation. Just pure focus and grit.

I charged.

Dodging molten rocks, I danced around his massive claws. My daggers flashed, slicing through cracks in his lava armor. I jabbed and stabbed, weaving through his fiery strikes.

Then I saw my moment.

I leapt up and plunged my dagger deep into his molten face.

Scar screamed—then lost his balance.

With a final push, I sent him *plunging* into the lava river below.

A huge plume of steam and flame shot up, lighting the sky.

The heat rolled over us like a wave.

I dropped to my knees, exhausted but victorious.

My friends gathered around, mouths agape.

Archie finally broke the silence.

"Don... that was... amazing."

I threw my hands up, grinning wide.

"YEAH, I KNOW RIGHT?! I TOOK DOWN MY FIRST ENEMY!"

My tail glowed yellow and wagged like crazy.

"I GOT MY FIRST WIN! I GOT MY FIRST WIN! OH-OH-AH! OH-OH-AH!"

I started dancing like an idiot.

"Doo doo do do do dooo—GOT MY FIRST WIN, YEAH!!"

Olsen smacked his forehead.

"Dude. You almost got cooked."

Prince whistled.

"Okay okay, I ain't gonna lie... that was some anime protagonist stuff, bro."

Archie pulled out the map.

"We're just a few hours from the Gadian Sea Kingdom. Better move before a lava shark shows up."

I raised my fists.

"GADIAN SEA KINGDOM, LET'S GOOOOOOOO!!!"

✧ #1.4 — Gadian Sea Ambience ✧

The Sand Dunes of Markilao lay still beneath the blazing sun, the Pyramids of Markilao rising from the desert. Their pale stone shimmered against endless gold. Symbols were carved deep into their faces, warnings, prayers, and histories no one remembered anymore.

Desert Cats lounged around the ruins, tails swaying lazily and ears twitching at the wind.

Then the wind died.

The air went cold.

A sharp crack echoed across the dunes as silver-white lunar energy tore through the sky. Sand detonated upward in a violent plume and rolled across the desert.

The Desert Cats panicked instantly.

They bolted, leaping, sprinting, and scrambling over stone and dune alike. Cries echoed as paws slipped in the loose sand. The entire colony scattered.

Dark Don descended slowly from above.

His wings stretched wide, edged in glowing silver light. Lunar energy bled from his body in violent pulses, white, radiant, and unstable. Wherever it touched the desert, glowing scars spread through the dunes. The ground cracked beneath him.

He landed hard.

The sand cratered outward.

Dark Don clenched his fists, breathing unevenly. His chest rose and fell like he'd just finished a war, but there was no enemy here.

Just ruins.

Just silence.

"I should've finished him," he muttered.

His voice trembled with frustration.

A pyramid behind him split down the middle. Stone groaned as lunar energy surged from his back. The top collapsed, raining glowing debris into the sand.

"I had the chance."

He took another step forward.

Silver light burst across the dunes.

Sand flattened.

Stone pillars shattered.

Ancient markings vanished beneath the destruction.

Something felt wrong.

He knew it back then.

In that moment.

When Don was vulnerable.

And he hesitated.

Dark Don growled and grabbed his head. Lunar energy flared wildly around him, white arcs snapping through the air.

"Silicia wouldn't have wanted mercy," he said.

Then he stopped.

His jaw tightened.

No.

She wouldn't have wanted this either.

A soft sound broke through the chaos.

A whimper.

Dark Don turned sharply.

At the base of a half-buried pillar stood a single Desert Cat, smaller than the others, sandy fur dusted with silver debris. Her ears were pinned back. Her tail was wrapped tightly around herself.

She wasn't running.

She couldn't.

Their eyes met.

Ella froze.

The lunar glow reflected in her wide eyes as Dark Don stared down at her. His energy surged instinctively. Silver light gathered around him.

Then it stopped.

His breath caught.

For a split second, the dunes fell silent again.

Ella took a shaky step back, paws trembling.

"P-Please..." she whispered. "We didn't do anything."

Dark Don said nothing.

His fists slowly unclenched.

The lunar energy around him flickered. It was still powerful. Still dangerous.

But the dunes stopped collapsing.

The destruction stopped spreading.

The silver glow dimmed and settled closer to his body.

He looked away first.

"...Run."

Ella didn't argue.

She turned and sprinted away, disappearing over the dunes after the others.

Dark Don stood alone among the ruins.

The Pyramids of Markilao were shattered.

The Sand Dunes were scarred and faintly glowing with lunar residue.

He stared at his trembling hands.

"I hesitated," he whispered. "And now everything's broken."

Silver energy pulsed around him once more. This time it stayed contained, tight and controlled.

Dark Don spread his wings.

Moonlight flared around him.

Then he vanished, leaving behind ruined sand, broken stone, and the echo of a choice he couldn't take back.

Near the Gadian Sea

The silver moon hovered above us, casting its dazzling glow across the night sky like it was trying to outshine the stars. And those stars? They were shimmering non-stop, painting the heavens with light while we stood in awe beneath it all. It was pitch black now, so dark I could barely see a thing unless it was right in front of me. We stood at the edge of a towering red cliff, connected to a network of canyons that overlooked the mighty Gadian Sea.

The waves were roaring, wild at first, smashing into each other with powerful crashes—then calmly retreating like they were catching their breath. Fish and dolphins leapt into the air in synchronized bursts of energy, diving back into the churning foam. The water was a blur of white and blue, fizzing like soda as it splashed against itself. It echoed beautifully across the sea.

We all stood there, staring down at the deep, mysterious water. Then Prince, of course, broke the silence. "Alright, so here's the thing... HOW DO WE GET UNDERWATER WITHOUT

DROWNING?!" he screeched, clearly panicking while peering into the abyss.

Here's the situation: Demaurion and Power? They're chill. They can breathe underwater like it's Tuesday. I can survive in space, so flex. Olsen's got underground breathing handled. And Prince? He can shatter air pressure with his raw lightning energy. But underwater breathing? Nah. Only Power and Demaurion got that skill set.

Power, the walking cheat code, could probably do anything if he wanted, but even he's got his limits. Demaurion though? Water is his whole vibe. He literally uses the Water Element and was born in the freaking Gadian Sea. A Leviathan by birth. Dude got sea monster DNA the minute he turned three.

Demaurion suddenly pulled out four glowing coins from a pouch and tossed them at us with a smug grin. "Think fast!"

We all fumbled, caught them, and stared at the shimmering blue glow. Each coin was ocean-deep blue with a carved water droplet logo glowing faintly. A soft liquid glow pulsed inside the engraved lines.

"What are these?" I asked, tilting my head.

"They're called Gais," Demaurion said, not looking at me, eyes locked on the waves. "As long as you're touching one, you can breathe underwater. No time limit."

"Huh," I said, pocketing mine. The others did the same.

Then Demaurion smirked as water started to swirl around his feet. "Now... who's ready to get wet?"

Archie, of course, didn't wait. His fiery Phoenix wings ignited behind him as he leapt off the cliff and cannonballed into the sea, fire trailing before being instantly extinguished. *SPLASH.*

We all exchanged looks. "LET'S GO!" I yelled, launching myself off the cliff like a missile. I dove into the water with

a massive splash and instantly felt the shift, it was peaceful, like floating in a dream.

Underwater, everything changed.

The ocean floor was glowing with radiant coral in every color imaginable. Red, pink, yellow, even glowing greens and whites. It looked like an underwater metropolis. Huge dune valleys housed coral-built structures. Ridges shot upward, pierced by thin, smooth stones that formed natural buildings with windows glowing from within. It was surreal, like an entire city breathing beneath the waves.

Schools of fish swam past, dolphins zigzagged playfully, and sharks cruised like guards on patrol. Clownfish peeked out of coral crevices. A hammerhead drifted past me like I wasn't even there. Eels lurked beside the rocky ridge homes, their eyes blinking with eerie calm.

"This... This is beautiful," I whispered, finally touching the ocean floor. Demaurion stood ahead, arms crossed, eyes soft. "I know, right? I miss this place..."

The others landed with big splashes, staring around in shock and awe. I walked beside Demaurion and nudged him with a smirk. "Didn't know you had a soft side for your hometown. You're usually the guy trying to bite someone's head off—"

"SHUT UP BEFORE I KILL YOU!" he snapped, face bright red.

Still has that short fuse. Classic Demaurion.

Glowing fish danced through the water, illuminating the sea like living lanterns. Pink and blue shells dotted the ground, each one casting a faint shimmer. I looked up, and through the surface of the water, the moon looked impossibly massive, like a divine silver eye watching over us.

"I think everyone's asleep," Olsen said, scanning the deserted cityscape.

He was right. The lights were on, but not a single soul in sight. No movement. Just calm water.

Demaurion raised his arms and formed a sleek dinghy out of water, motioning for us to hop on. We climbed in, and the boat responded with a soft gurgle, beginning to glide forward on its own.

"Take us to Reef City," Demaurion whispered.

And just like that, we were off.

We passed under massive stone arches and swam past intricate coral towers. It was like gliding through a dream. Eventually, we arrived at Reef City—and whoa, it was wild.

The citizens here were literal water beings. Their bodies rippled like liquid statues, cruising along in boats made from polished wood. Some vessels drifted slowly, others sped past in a rush. Massive ridges framed the area, and long, thin rock spires poked from the cliffsides like ribs. Lights flickered in small window-like gaps—homes, maybe.

We traveled deeper into the city, passing through narrow canyons where coral grew from every crevice. Schools of fish swirled above us, turtles napped on ledges, and more underwater life zoomed past.

This place? Yeah, it definitely made the Top 10 list of Beautiful Places in Avangard.

Still... I noticed something. All the civilians were made of water—except Demaurion.

I turned to him, brows raised. "Yo... why are you the only one here with skin?"

He paused. Then answered, voice low but steady.

"Well... My mom went into labor before she could get back to the Gadian Kingdom. We were still on Iris Town's shore after visiting my grandfather. I was... impatient. Kicking like crazy.

Acting like her stomach was a jail cell. I forced my way out before we reached the hospital."

I blinked. "So you were born on the shore?"

"Yeah," he nodded. "My parents were pure water-beings. I wasn't. I didn't get a water body—I was born with skin. I was still Oceananite, but... different. Everyone made fun of me. Called me names. I had friends, but during the Triple-Tryple War, they all—" His voice cracked. "They didn't make it."

He swallowed hard.

"So I made a choice," he said, gripping his trident. "Run from those nightmares... or fight them. And I chose to fight. I *am* Demaurion the Oceananite—the Leviathan man. And I will become a Hero of Avangard. Not just to fulfill the prophecy, but so no one ever sees me as a freak again."

I smiled. "Keep dreaming, bro. I believe in you."

I leaned back and exhaled. "Y'know... I wanted to be a Hero too. I used to be such a clown. Nobody thought I had what it takes. But now? After being chosen for this prophecy, becoming a Celestianite commander... I finally feel like I matter."

Then—*RRRRRRRRMMMMMMM.*

The water trembled.

Our heads whipped around. A massive cave loomed in the distance, covered in coral and moss. Then... a low, bone-shaking roar echoed through the abyss.

We'd reached the edge of Reef City. It was darker here. The bright blues faded into navy shadows.

I checked the map. My eyes widened.

"We're at the Leviathan Pool," I whispered.

"Can this boat do a U-turn?!" I shouted. But it was too late.

A massive blue tentacle lashed from the depths and *grabbed* the boat. We were flung upward, sky-high, all of us screaming,

"AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!"

SPLAAAAAASH!

The boat hit the water again—but before we could breathe, the Leviathan rose.

Its head breached the surface, casting a shadow that swallowed the sea. Its glowing golden eyes stared us down. Mist rolled in. The wind howled. Waves began to churn violently.

"OH GREAT! WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO NOW—FIGHT THIS GUY?!"

It looked like a colossal sea dragon with sharp, clean rows of 100 teeth. Its face was serpentine, covered in sleek scales of stormy blue and purple. Eight enormous cyan tentacles flexed and twitched, each one strong enough to snap our boat in half.

Then came the tsunami—towering, unstoppable.

"WATCH OUT!" I yelled.

Demaurion leapt from the boat and *slashed* the wave in half with a swipe of his arm. Water scattered into mist, sparkling under the moonlight. He now stood on the water, transformed into his Leviathan hybrid form—his tail glistening, his body scarred, but his spirit unshaken.

He raised his trident, glaring down the ancient sea monster.

"Come and get me... you Leviathan beast."

✧ #1.5 — Sandy Dunys ✧

Demaurion stood on the water, his eyes locked with the Leviathan's glowing yellow gaze. The beast's massive form loomed over him, dark waters swirling around its immense body. With a deafening roar, the Leviathan unleashed a torrent of power, sending waves crashing into one another.

Demaurion puffed out his cheeks, a small water bubble escaping his nose.

"Hmph, the most powerful beast there is in the land... The Leviathan," he muttered to himself. "I think this is one of the worst of Avangard's beasts. You guys go ahead. I'll handle him."

The sea responded instantly, churning with fury as the storm above raged to life. The skies darkened with ominous gray clouds, and the waves grew increasingly violent. Thunder rumbled overhead, followed by a blinding flash of lightning that struck just beside our boat.

The sudden jolt sent us flying.

We crashed into the sea beside Demaurion, waves slamming us in every direction.

"GOOD LUCK, DEMAURION!!!" I shouted over the chaos.

The Leviathan answered with a roar that shook the ocean itself.

Then it moved.

Its gigantic body burst from the sea, water cascading off black scales the size of houses. The monster lunged straight toward Demaurion, jaws opening wide enough to swallow an entire ship.

Demaurion threw both hands forward.

"NOT TODAY!"

BOOOOOOOOM!

A massive wall of water erupted upward and collided with the Leviathan's head. The impact exploded into a towering spray, but the beast ripped straight through it.

"OH COME ON!"

I shot into the air before my brain could catch up with my body.

Purple celestial energy ignited around my wings.

"DEMAURION! LITTLE HELP!"

"I'M BUSY!"

"FAIR ENOUGH!"

I blasted toward the Leviathan anyway.

The monster twisted its neck and snapped at me.

CHOMP!

Its jaws missed by inches.

"TOO SLOW!"

I flipped through the air and summoned my Celestial Daggers. Violet energy crackled across the blades as I dove toward its head.

"CELESTIAL SLASH!"

SHIIIIING!

My daggers carved across the Leviathan's face, opening two glowing cuts along its scales.

The beast roared in pain.

"HEY!"

I pointed both daggers at it.

"THAT ACTUALLY WORKED!"

The Leviathan immediately slammed its tail into me.

WHAAAAAAAAAM!

I became a purple blur flying across the ocean.

"NEVER MIND!"

I skipped across the water several times before crashing into a wave.

Demaurion winced.

"Don!"

"I'M GOOD!"

"I DON'T THINK YOU ARE!"

"THAT'S FAIR!"

The Leviathan surged forward again, creating a whirlpool beneath its body. The ocean twisted violently as enormous currents pulled everything toward the center.

Demaurion narrowed his eyes.

"Alright. If you want water..."

His body erupted with blue energy.

"LET'S USE WATER!"

The sea rose around him.

TSUNAMIIIIIIIIIII!

Massive walls of water spiraled upward from every direction, wrapping around the Leviathan like gigantic aquatic chains.

For the first time, the beast slowed.

I immediately understood the assignment.

"Oh, we're jumping him."

"WE ARE ABSOLUTELY JUMPING HIM!"

I launched forward.

FWOOOOOOOSH!

Demaurion tightened his grip on the water currents while I

shot across the stormy sky.

The Leviathan thrashed violently, trying to break free.

Too late.

I appeared above its head.

My daggers ignited with celestial energy.

"DOUBLE CELESTIAL STRIKE!"

SHING!

SHING!

The blades plunged deep into the softer scales near its neck.

The Leviathan screamed.

Demaurion seized the opening.

A gigantic spear of compressed water formed above his hand.

"LEVIATHAN BREAKER!"

BOOOOOOOOOOM!

The water spear blasted straight through the wounds I'd opened.

For a second, everything froze.

Then the Leviathan's eyes widened.

Cracks of blue energy spread through its neck.

The beast let out one final roar before collapsing.

KRAAAAAAAAAAAAAASH!

Its enormous body crashed into the sea, creating a tidal wave that rolled across the horizon.

Silence.

The storm seemed to pause.

I floated there, breathing hard.

Demaurion stared at the sinking corpse.

"...Did we just kill the Leviathan?"

I blinked.

"Pretty sure."

The body slowly disappeared beneath the waves.

A beat passed.

Then the ocean exploded.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

A monstrous tsunami surged upward from beneath the sinking beast. The Leviathan's death had destabilized the entire sea. Massive currents collided with one another, creating waves larger than anything we'd seen before.

"Oh."

Demaurion looked up.

"Oh that's bad."

A second wave swallowed the first.

A third wave swallowed both of them.

The ocean became chaos.

Our boat was ripped into the air and hurled across the vast Gadian Sea.

We were thrown after it.

Miraculously, the boat crashed back into the water with us landing nearby, but the storm had become far worse. Waves slammed together with deafening force. The sea below felt alive, dragging us in every direction.

Up.

Down.

Up.

Down.

Lightning crackled.

Thunder boomed.

The storm turned violent.

I gripped the edge of the boat as it rocked beneath us.

"IS EVERYONE OKAY?!"

"YUP! I THINK SO!" Archie shouted back.

"I think I'm gonna get seasick," Prince groaned weakly.

His face turned an unsettling shade of green.

A second later he threw up over the side.

"PRINCE THAT'S DISGUSTING!"

Before anyone could react, another wave launched us skyward.

Water surged around us as the storm raged on. The wind howled across the sea, sending the boat into a frenzy of motion. Each wave was stronger than the last.

Then lightning struck just behind us.

BOOOOOOOM!

The force blasted us out of the boat entirely.

I flailed through the water, arms windmilling uselessly.

"OH SHOOT! WE'RE GONNA DROWN!"

The ocean swallowed me.

Instantly.

As I sank beneath the surface, panic exploded through my chest. I held my breath and kicked desperately, trying to reach the surface.

The waves had other plans.

They spun me around like laundry.

Now, there's good news and bad news.

The good news is that I'm pretty good at holding my breath.

The bad news?

I don't know how to swim.

At all.

The salty water burned my eyes. Everything around me was a dark blue blur. I blinked rapidly as currents slammed into me from every direction.

A massive tsunami surged underneath me.

Then it swallowed me whole.

The force carried me through the ocean like a ragdoll.

I couldn't control my body.

Couldn't find the surface.

Couldn't breathe.

Couldn't think.

I opened my mouth for air.

Big mistake.

Water rushed in.

Panic surged.

I snapped my mouth shut.

The current dragged me deeper.

I couldn't find anyone.

I didn't know which way was up or down.

My body twisted helplessly beneath the storm.

"PRINCE! OLSEN! ARCHIE! POWER?! ARE YOU GUYS THERE?!"

My voice vanished into the ocean.

Water flooded into my mouth again.

Another wave slammed into me.

The world spun.

Everything became colder.

Heavier.

My movements slowed.

The storm faded into distant noise.

I drifted deeper into the darkness.

A tiny bubble escaped from my nose.

Then another.

And then...

Everything went black.

A Few Hours Later…

Faint voices drifted in and out of my head, blurry and overlapping, like I'd woken up in the middle of a group chat argument.

"Is he breathing?"

"He better not be dead, I swear."

"Give him space."

"Move. All of you."

That last voice was calm and firm. The kind of calm that didn't ask for permission.

My eyes cracked open.

Bright light.

Wind.

Sand everywhere.

I was sitting on something soft, but my brain was lagging like it needed a system update. When I shifted, pain flared through my arm.

"Easy," the calm voice said. "You took a hit."

I groaned and pushed myself upright.

We were in the Sand Dunes.

Not the pretty postcard version, either.

This place looked wrecked. Dunes had been torn apart, sand piled into unnatural ridges, and dust hung thick in the air, scraping my throat every time I breathed. The sky was a pale, sickly beige, like the desert itself hadn't recovered yet.

People surrounded me.

A lot of people.

At first glance they looked human, dressed in travel clothes, scarves, and jackets. Then my vision finally focused.

Bushy tails flicked nervously behind them.

Fluffy ears poked through hoods and headwraps, twitching at

every sound.

Desert Cats.

All in base form.

No armor.

No weapons.

Just shaken.

Some knelt beside each other. Others whispered quietly. A few stared at me like I might explode if they looked away.

I glanced down at my arm.

Bandaged.

Clean.

Tight.

"Who—"

"You're awake," someone said.

Ella stepped forward.

She looked exactly how I remembered. Yellow-brown ears. Tail swaying low and slow. A sand-colored mask hanging around her neck. Her eyes looked sharp, alert, and tired in the way responsibility makes someone tired.

"You're safe," she said. "As safe as anyone gets out here."

I swallowed.

"What happened?"

A nearby Desert Cat flinched.

Ella noticed immediately.

She turned toward the group.

"It's okay," she said. "He needs to know."

That didn't make me feel better.

She crouched in front of me.

"You collapsed near the outer dunes. Looked like exhaustion mixed with lingering damage. We brought you back before the storms got worse."

I flexed my fingers.

"Thanks... I think."

"You're welcome."

She stood and gestured toward the horizon, "And before you ask, yes. This is what's left."

I followed her gaze.

The Pyramids of Markilao loomed in the distance.

Or what remained of them.

Massive stone structures that once stood smooth and towering were now fractured, split apart, and partially collapsed. One pyramid had been sheared clean down the side, faint white cracks still glowing where lunar energy had burned through ancient stone. Another sat half-buried beneath dunes that clearly hadn't formed naturally.

The place looked like the moon had punched straight through it.

My stomach dropped.

"Dark Don."

Every Desert Cat went silent.

Ella nodded.

"He came without warning."

She paced slowly, her tail stiff behind her.

"Silver-white energy. Lunar. Controlled at first, then not. He hovered above the dunes like he was deciding whether to wipe us out."

A murmur spread through the crowd.

"He didn't target us directly at first. He attacked the pyramids. Tore into them like they personally offended him. Stone didn't stand a chance."

I clenched my fists.

"Why?"

Her jaw tightened.

"Anger. Frustration. We heard him shouting about a mistake. About not finishing something when he had the chance."

My chest went cold.

"He scared everyone," Ella said quietly. "Families ran. Kids hid under collapsed pillars. We lost supplies. Records. History. If he'd wanted us gone, we wouldn't be standing here."

I looked around at the shaken Desert Cats. Some clutched each other. Others kept their tails wrapped tightly around their legs.

"And Insane Middle School?" I asked.

Ella exhaled.

"That happened before this."

She met my eyes.

"The moment he showed up, alarms went off. Staff didn't hesitate. They sent everyone home and evacuated the school."

That hit harder than I expected.

"So you came here."

She nodded.

"The school wasn't safe anymore. And the Sand Dunes were supposed to be."

Her ears flicked toward the ruined pyramids.

"Guess we were wrong."

For a moment, no one spoke.

The wind dragged sand across broken stone, whispering through the scars Dark Don had carved into the desert.

Then Ella straightened.

"We're still standing," she said, her voice carrying across the group. "And as long as that's true, we rebuild. We adapt. We prepare."

Her eyes flicked back toward me.

"And you," she added in a no-nonsense tone, "are not allowed

to pass out again. Not today."

Despite everything, I snorted.

"No promises."

Ella chuckled softly.

"If you want my advice, stick to water for fun and leave the sticks for roasting marshmallows."

She glanced ahead, already moving.

"And we should probably head back to the Pyramids of Markilao before you start collecting any more battle scars."

I followed as the group set off across the dunes.

Sand crunched beneath our feet in a steady rhythm, and for once the wind wasn't trying to kill us. It nudged us forward instead, almost like it was on our side.

"So," Ella said casually as she walked beside me, "one of the most powerful Elementanites, huh?"

"Gee, thanks," I said with a smirk. "Really keeps me grounded."

She shot me a look that was half amused and half analytical.

"I'm serious. The way you all adapt is wild. Wings as blankets. Color-changing tails. Efficient, creative, and mildly chaotic. I'd take notes, but unfortunately I'm the adult here."

I laughed and shook my head.

"Yeah. We're kind of a mess."

She tilted her head.

"Ever been to the Sand Dunes before?"

"Not really. Just stories. Mostly from the CL War."

Her expression softened.

"I still get uneasy thinking about Dark Don. One minute he's breaking into your school, the next everyone's being evacuated. Nobody knows where he came from or why he's after you."

She exhaled slowly.

"Makes me want to triple-check every exit."

I shrugged.

"Probably wants me dead. Seems like a popular goal."

Ella raised an eyebrow and glanced at my wings.

"Then explain this. Where'd your scales go?"

I looked down at myself.

Smooth skin.

No armor.

"Lost them fighting King Scar," I said, like it was completely normal.

She smirked. It was the exact expression of a parent catching their kid doing something unbelievably reckless.

"Of course you did. Typical Celestianites."

Hours later, the Pyramids of Markilao rose from the dunes.

Five massive structures loomed ahead, ancient and imposing, their stone sides constantly brushed by drifting sand. Even damaged, they felt powerful. Like they were watching us right back.

Ella led us inside the central pyramid.

The interior looked like someone had fused a museum with a training facility.

Fossils lined the walls.

Sandstone bricks formed wide platforms.

At the center sat an enormous sand table covered in terrain markers and ancient symbols.

It was impressive.

And a little intimidating.

Prince stared around with wide eyes.

"Why does this look exactly like the museum I lightning-struck last year?"

Ella didn't even hesitate.

"Because this is the museum you lightning-struck last year."

Power grinned.

"Perfect, then."

He pointed at us.

"You five. Don, Olsen, Prince, Demaurion, Archie. You're about to train for three days. By the end of it, you won't just survive fights."

His grin widened.

"You'll win them."

Olsen practically vibrated with excitement.

"THIS IS GONNA BE AWESOME."

Power opened his mouth to calm him down, but I tackled Olsen into a hug before he got the chance. My tail flashed yellow before I could stop it.

Ella sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose.

"Please don't get sand in anyone's hair."

She looked around the room.

"And remember, this isn't a vacation. Hydrate, focus, and try not to explode into unnecessary heroic chaos."

"We'll try," I said with a grin.

She smirked.

"That didn't sound convincing."

Then she glanced toward Archie.

"Now let's start before someone accidentally sets the pyramid on fire."

Archie pointed at himself.

"Why does everyone keep assuming it's gonna be me?"

Day 1

Brutal.

Power wasted zero time easing us in. Strength tests. Heavy

weights. Fifty push-ups in five minutes.

Absolute misery.

Olsen demolished it—not fast, just unstoppable. He lifted *double* the required weight like it was a warm-up.

I held my own. Prince struggled hard. Demaurion powered through on pure anger. Archie... yeah. It was rough.

I managed five reps.

Olsen did sixty.

I was not jealous.

Okay, I was extremely jealous.

Power checked the stats.

Don: Stamina 50%, Strength 30%, Speed 80%, Durability 50%

Olsen: Strength 100%, Stamina 100%, Speed 45%, Durability 50%

Prince: Strength 25%, Speed 100%, Stamina 100%, Durability 29%

Demaurion: Strength 29%, Speed 60%, Stamina 35%, Durability 30%

Archie: Strength 15%, Speed 20%, Stamina 16%, Durability 18%

"Archie," Power muttered, "you've got work to do."

By the end of the day, everything hurt—but it worked. My strength shot up to 92%. Even Olsen somehow climbed to 110%, which honestly felt illegal.

Day 2

Speed and reaction time.

Running across sand was pure evil. Olsen failed on speed but refused to quit. Prince crushed it. Archie somehow passed, which shocked everyone—including Archie. Demaurion strug-

gled at first, then adapted.

When it was my turn, I cleared it easily. My Celestial abilities kicked in hard—faster than I'd ever been, even compared to my fight with King Scar.

Later, Power tested reactions with a fake valorent gun.

I dodged before the shot even reached me.

Dragon instincts don't miss.

Day 3

Elemental training.

This was the good stuff.

Power explained that Elements weren't just weapons—they were tools for survival, movement, strategy. How you fought mattered as much as what you could do.

"Movesets are everything," Power said. "Master one, and you control the fight."

I was buzzing. The idea of creating my own moveset felt like the final step—like I was finally becoming the hero I was supposed to be.

That night, the sun dipped below the dunes, painting the sky in gold and purple before fading into stars. Moonlight spilled over the sand, silver and quiet.

Inside the pyramid, the lights shut off—probably Ella.

Crickets chirped outside. Something slithered past the walls. I flew up and hooked myself onto a handlebar, hanging upside down and watching my friends settle into their sleeping bags below.

Ella had already set everything up.

For once, the world felt still.

And deep down, I knew it.

Whatever came next—

nothing was going to be the same.

✧ #1.6 — Getting Prepared ✧

I woke up and looked down from my perch. Everyone else was already up. Guess I overslept again.

Sunlight poured through the entrance, casting golden beams onto the floor. The sky outside was a flawless blue, glowing with the sun's radiant energy. The clouds drifted by — fast, but peacefully. Tumbleweeds rolled across the tall, thick sand dunes, and the wind whooshed like usual, rushing past with a familiar hum.

I unfolded my dragon wings and glided gently back down to the ground, landing with a soft thud on my feet.

Ella and Power were at the table, casually munching on breakfast. The others? Already outside, deep in training mode.

I stepped through the doorway and spotted them, each locked in their own element-honed battle routines. Lemme break down what I saw:

Olsen's Earth Moveset

- **Seismic Smash**: He slams the ground with raw force, sending out a shockwave that could wreck everything in his path.
- **Rolling Smash**: He stomps the ground, launching a boulder into the air, then spin-kicks it straight at the enemy like a

meteor.

- **Spiky Ground**: A quick punch creates five massive, jagged rock spikes jutting up from the ground.
- **Earth Pillar**: His arm transforms into a rocky pillar, extending like a battering ram to strike from a distance.
- **Insane Collateral Damage**: Olsen wraps himself in earth armor, then triggers a quake that erupts with 30 tightly packed earth spikes all around him.

Prince's Lightning Moveset

- **Electrical Charge**: He lunges forward, electricity crackling as he delivers a thunderclap punch that leaves a shockwave behind.
- **500 Volts**: Charging up, he zips in with a blur of punches, dashes around the opponent, and ends it with a hurricane kick that explodes on contact.
- **10,000 Volts**: A massive lightning beam erupts from his hands, leveling anything caught in its path.
- **Fry**: He drains electricity from nearby sources, then blitzes around the opponent, forming a lightning vortex before sending them sky-high — and axe-kicking them back down.
- **3.5 Million Volts**: He condenses a huge ball of lightning in his hand and slams it down, sending out a frying shockwave that can roast any limb used to launch it.

Demaurion's Water Moveset

- **Tidal Beam**: A focused water beam with pressure that adapts

— weak when he's tired, brutal when he's fired up.

- **Flood**: A massive water vortex crashes down, slamming and potentially crushing his target with sheer weight and pressure.
- **Tidal Slash**: A high-pressure water slash sharp enough to cut through solid rock.
- **Tsunami Wave**: He summons a devastating wall of water capable of obliterating anything in its path — and drowning the careless.
- **Water Domain**: Demaurion submerges the area in an illusion-like underwater world, pulling enemies into a drowning battlefield.

Archie's Fire Moveset

- **Burning Fireball**: A soccer ball-sized flame projectile, sizzling with power.
- **Burning Boom**: He claps his flaming fists together, creating a burst of fire that incinerates everything in front of him.
- **Fire Beam**: A continuous stream of fire that detonates on impact.
- **Flaming Gauntlets**: Fire-forged gauntlets boost his melee attacks to scorching levels.
- **Blazing Hell**: He forms a gigantic fireball in his hands and slams it down, triggering a fiery explosion that devours the battlefield.

My (Don's) Celestial Moveset

- **Spin Drop**: Mid-air, I spin into a celestial vortex and crash down with explosive force.
- **Celestial Uppercut**: My fists glow with energy as I unleash a rising uppercut that detonates on contact.**5**
- **50-50-50 Celestial Dropkick**: I power up, teleport around randomly, and launch a brutal dropkick — double-footed and devastating.
- **Celestial Bash**: I toss the enemy skyward, teleport above, and hammer them with a fistful of celestial fury.
- **Blinding Destruction**: I clap, flashbang the opponent, summon 10 mirrors, and phase into pure energy — bouncing mirror to mirror at light speed before smashing their face and shattering the mirrors in one blazing punch.

"Yo, morning y'all! How's it going?" I waved as I walked over.

Olsen turned after finishing his Seismic Smash and grinned. "Good! You?"

"Chillin'. Kinda can't believe we're actually training with *THE* Power Z though."

Demaurion sliced through a cactus with Tidal Slash. "Who knows... maybe one day we'll be the next Heroes of Avangard. All thanks to this guy."

I flopped down into the sand and looked up at the blazing sun. Hot as ever, even with the wind whistling past my ears, the heat was no joke. Still, something about the way the tumbleweeds rolled and the sunlight poured onto me... it felt peaceful. Kinda like those calm mornings back in Iris Town.

I stood up, stretched a bit, and started practicing.

The 50-50-50 Celestial Dropkick was still tricky. The timing, the teleporting, the double-footed madness — yeah, it was a

beast.

Celestial Bash took a while too. The teleporting alone made it a pain to nail, but I eventually got the rhythm.

Blinding Destruction? *Bro.* That one was a full workout. Clapping my hands? Easy. Transforming into celestial energy? Cake. Moving faster than light? Strangely doable. But *timing* that final punch? Tough as hell.

Still, I kept grinding. Punches, jabs, spin kicks — even threw a few backhands at Casper for practice. Every time my body lit up with celestial crackles, I knew I was leveling up.

After hours of straight-up cosmic training, I started getting the hang of it. I kept going until I mastered them all.

Then, just as the sun began to shift in the sky, Power and Ella stepped out of the pyramid.

Power's blue aura sparked like a live wire as he cracked his knuckles and said, "Alright guys — today's the day you get to fight... *me.*"

Everyone lost it.

Prince got so hyped he accidentally zapped Olsen.

Power just smirked as he stepped forward, fists clenched, energy sizzling in the air around him.

"So... who's going first?"

"Hey—but before you guys get to sparring," Ella said. "I got something to show you all...."

At Foreshade

It was a dark and stormy night.

Werewolves howled in the distance, their voices slicing through the air like lightning. The silver moon glowed fiercely

above, but even its light couldn't pierce the black, suffocating gloom that blanketed the land.

The very air shimmered with shards of dark glass, as if reality itself had cracked. A kingdom of towering black structures loomed across the landscape, each one pulsing with an eerie purple aura. Fog—thick, jet-black, and suffocating—crawled through every crevice.

At the center of it all stood the castle of King Dreadixz—a spindly, monstrous tower surrounded by other looming structures, like skeletal fingers reaching for the void. Beyond it stretched jagged black mountains and bleak valleys carved from rock, drenched in silence so deep it felt alive.

Only the wolves dared make a sound.

Four massive bridges of dark stone stretched from each corner of the castle, connecting to the surrounding cliffs. But only one, ancient and crumbling, led directly to the Entrance of Dread.

Through the portcullis, the castle's interior was pure nightmare fuel.

A throne of black stone sat in the center of a grand, dim hall, outlined in sinister violet. Pillars of obsidian stood like sentinels, each topped with raging violet flames. Skulls littered the floor, some piled high like offerings, others scattered carelessly, recent trophies, perhaps.

Behind the throne, a tattered purple banner hung like a shadow. On it: a crescent moon, white as bone.

A medieval red carpet stretched across the floor, lined with golden trim. Stained glass windows—black and purple, diamond-shaped, lined the walls on both sides, casting strange fractured light into the darkness.

Seated on the throne was King Dreadixz, once a humble miner, now a monstrous king intoxicated by power. His tattered purple

cape swayed with a life of its own. He wore black samurai armor, polished like obsidian, though no helmet adorned his head. Instead, a jagged stone mask covered one eye, the other burning faintly with lunar energy. The mask was forged from pure stone, carved with sharp ridges and soaked in lunar darkness.

From his back unfurled massive, sharpened black dragon wings. His tail—long, barbed, and menacing—coiled at his side like a serpent ready to strike.

A knock echoed from the castle gates.

"Enter..." Dreadixz said, his voice like gravel soaked in poison.

The gates creaked open.

Dark Don stepped into the room, his presence like a chill crawling across the skin. His metal-plated shoes clicked ominously against the stone floor as he approached the throne. He gave a low bow.

"Master," he began, "I've served loyally as your second-in-command, and I remain honored. But I bring grave news. The five children... they are the Chosen Ones. If they locate the *Lost Key*, we'll lose any chance of dominating this world."

He paused, then raised his hand.

"That's why I've brought this to you... The Black Power Gem—also known as the Incarceration Gem."

From his cloak, he revealed a gleaming gem pulsing with dark energy. Shadows swirled around it, twisting and writhing like spirits trying to escape.

Dreadixz stood slowly, his eyes glowing with cruel delight.

"Ah... yes," he said. "You, Dark Don, have never failed me. So loyal. So wicked. So perfect..."

He stepped down from the throne and took the gem telekinetically, drawing it into his palm as if gravity itself obeyed him.

"Perhaps, when I pass into the afterlife... *you* may take my

place."

Dark Don bowed again. "I accept the honor, King Dreadixz."

Dreadixz turned the gem in his hand, examining it with cold reverence.

"This gem... it doesn't serve its wielder. It consumes them. Unstoppable. Beautiful. Destructive. Shame that Incarceration Z is still loyal to the Zeniths... but I have my own party-crasher."

He turned toward the entrance.

"**OVERBRAWL!**"

A red-orange glow filled the room as **Overbrawl** stepped inside.

His body radiated chaos, literally. Red and orange energy pulsed around him like living flame. His eyes burned with untamed fury. A tattered red scarf whipped behind him, trailing sparks with each step.

Dark Don smirked.

"You've chosen wisely, my king," he said, eyes on the new arrival. "Overbrawl was once one of Power's greatest rivals. Defeated, yes, but never outmatched. His Element is Chaos itself."

Overbrawl glared up at Dreadixz, chaotic energy flashing in his pupils like stormlight.

"You summoned me?" he said, voice low and dangerous. "If this is a waste of time, I'll kill you where you sit. Ten seconds. No more."

Dreadixz sneered, then turned to Dark Don with a sigh of disgust.

Overbrawl didn't respect Dreadixz, not one bit. But he obeyed... as long as the gold kept flowing.

Dreadixz shot him a venomous glare. "When will you learn to *kneel* before your king?"

"I don't kneel for overgrown dragon tyrants," Overbrawl snapped. "I don't care about your war. I care about gold. You got a mission, then give it. If not, I'm out."

Dreadixz let out a slow breath.

"I do have a mission," he said coldly. "Find the Chosen Ones... and eliminate them."

At the Sand Dunes

"Welcome to the Dune's Kingdom." Ella spreads her arms and stares down at the city like she's announcing a magic show. Below us the town looks built from one impossible sandbox: towers, spires, and houses all hewn from sand that somehow refuses to tumble. Dunenanite Dragons, Chimeras, some colossal glowing Buddhas, lots of prehistoric and mythic reptiles as Dunenanites. It's retro-sandcore, and it's beautiful.

I scan the crowd with the boys—Olsen, Prince, Demaurion, Archie—then freeze. Queen Dune herself is strolling through the plaza, chatting with citizens as casually as someone discussing the weather. She's statuesque in a sandy-brown gown that sparkles like sunlight on dunes, a circular crown perched on immaculate hair. Calm, regal, wholly unbothered. She gives "royalty who owns the chill" energy.

Power stands next to me, arms folded, all seriousness. "Dune doesn't want war," he says. "But she used to. Forestinites, Lunaranites—people keep marching in looking for trouble."

"So why is the city still standing?" My violet eyes track the wind and the grit-smudged sky.

Power's voice drops to a conspiratorial whisper. "Because they moved the kingdom's heart. To outsiders, it's a mirage. If

you can't see the city, you're a threat. If you can... apparently you're okay. Doesn't mean there aren't monsters, though."

If I can see it, I guess I'm not the threat. I glance back—everyone's nodding like the sensible bunch of idiots they are—and give a thumbs-up. "Cool. That's our next beast. Don't worry—I'll deal with it in no time."

Classic me: say it like it's a TikTok tutorial, then leap off the sand in a burst of violet celestial energy.

For a hot second the Dunenanites keep minding their beeswax. Then they look up. Then they look right at me. Then their eyes bulge because some idiot from the sky is about to crater their main street.

WHAM.

My face finds sand in the most dramatic, face-first way possible. I tumble across the plaza, creating a dust storm and living my best bowling-ball life—Dunanites scatter like pins. I burst through a window, pop into a house, and—of course—land in a bathtub.

SPLASH.

Bubbles everywhere. A woman—white-skinned, twenty-something, dragon wings the color of half-melted caramel (why am I describing this)—stares at me like I'm a particularly rude sea creature. Bubbles cling to the tub rim. She's obviously mid-bath and wildly not thrilled. Her jaw drops. So does mine. My face goes fifty shades of tomato. I squeak the most pathetic "Hi...?" possible.

She shrieks, tail-whips me through the window like a human slingshot, and I go airborne again, sail into the street, and land—hard—right in front of Queen Dune.

Hallucination-level dizziness. My vision is that cartoon blur where everything is slightly too far away. Then my friends loom

over me like a jury that's just seen a trainwreck.

"Bud," Prince says, grinning. "You really gotta work on your landing technique."

He helps me up. I dust sand out of my hair, cough twice for dramatic effect, and straighten up to Queen Dune, who's smiling like she's genuinely amused.

"Name's Dune," she says—clipped British phrasing, voice like honey poured through glass. "And you are?"

"Don—Lens Don, the Celestianite." I offer my hand like some overconfident prince in a parody romance.

She chuckles softly, shaking it. "A pleasure, Don."

Behind me, male soldiers *collectively malfunction*. I can literally feel the simping. Not me though. Totally not me. My tail flicks pink. Okay fine—*mildly simp-adjacent.*

"You've come to battle the kingdom's tyrant?" she asks, arms crossed.

"Yeah. Pretty sure it's somewhere nearby." I flex, and a golden star flashes from my eye—because apparently I can't stop being extra.

Her gaze shifts to Ella. "Ella, darling! What a surprise."

Ella bows slightly. "My pleasure, Your Highness. I'm sure you know Power?"

"Unfortunately," Dune teases. "Still stubborn, I see."

Power sighs. "It's been a thousand years and you're not wrong."

Dune's smile fades as her tone hardens. "You've chosen a dangerous time to arrive. The Markilao Titanoboa has awakened again. It's no mindless creature—it sees through deception, moves faster than a sandstorm, and strikes with the wisdom of something *ancient.*"

"Sounds fun," sarcasm was definitely there.

She raises a brow. "It spits golden venom that burns hotter than magma, and it hunts by sound and movement. Even illusions fail to fool it for long."

"No problem ma'am, let Don do the talking to this big and long snake thi—"

BOOOOOOM.

The desert exploded.

Not figuratively.

Actually exploded.

The moment the ground ruptured, the entire plaza detonated upward in a violent eruption of sandstone and debris as thousands of tons of earth blasted into the sky.

KRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAK!!!

Ancient stone streets split apart.

Buildings trembled.

The screaming crowd scattered in every direction.

Then something began rising.

Slowly.

Relentlessly.

Like the desert itself was forcing a monster back into existence.

The ground continued splitting wider.

And wider.

And wider.

Until the crack stretched across the entire horizon.

Golden eyes opened inside the abyss.

The temperature spiked.

A hiss rolled across Markilao, like ten thousand blades scraping against each other at once.

Then the creature emerged.

The Markilao Titanoboa.

Its body rose higher.

And higher.

And higher.

A living mountain of muscle and scales erupted from beneath the city, its colossal form twisting into the sky as golden scales shimmered beneath the moonlight like molten sandstone.

The horizon disappeared behind it.

Its body was so enormous I couldn't even see where it ended.

I stared.

My brain refused to process the size.

"I expected it to be big and long..."

A beat.

"...NOT THICK AND LONG!"

The Titanoboa immediately answered my disrespect.

WHOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!

Its tail descended from the heavens.

The entire city vanished beneath its shadow.

"OH COME ON—"

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!

The impact vaporized half the plaza.

Stone erupted.

Buildings shattered.

A shockwave blasted through the city.

I got launched.

Hard.

The world became a blur of sand and sky as I flipped through the air before driving both daggers into the sandstone.

SKRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR!!!

Sparks exploded.

My shoes carved trenches through the desert.

I finally stopped.

Then everything went quiet.

Too quiet.

My eyes slowly lifted.

The Titanoboa was staring directly at me.

Its golden eyes narrowed.

The scales around its throat shifted.

A molten glow began building inside its mouth.

"...uh oh."

FWOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!

A beam of liquid gold erupted across the battlefield.

The desert vanished.

The beam carved through buildings like they were paper before detonating against the city behind me.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!

Fire consumed everything.

A mushroom cloud of sand and flame erupted into the sky.

I rolled across the ground.

Barely.

Barely.

Avoiding death by inches.

I slowly stood.

"Okay."

I pointed at the giant snake.

"Note to self."

The city behind me exploded.

"DON'T LET IT BREATHE."

I took off.

Celestial energy exploded beneath my feet.

FWOOOOM!!!

The desert blurred beneath me.

One leap.

Two leaps.

Three.

I launched off a dune and rocketed skyward before landing directly on the Titanoboa's back.

My daggers flashed.

SHING!

SHING!

SHING!

SHING!

Sparks erupted.

The sound wasn't flesh.

It wasn't scales.

It sounded like I was stabbing a tank.

The Titanoboa twisted violently.

The entire world tilted.

Sandstorms spiraled around us.

Its body coiled through the sky like a living dragon.

Then it adapted.

I saw it happen.

Its movements changed.

Its eyes tracked me.

It wasn't reacting anymore.

It was predicting.

The serpent had learned my rhythm.

"Oh that's bad."

Its tail snapped upward.

WHAM!!!

I got launched into the sky.

The clouds shattered around me.

I flipped.

Twisted.

Then pointed both daggers downward.

"CELESTIAL BURST!"

BOOOOOOOOM!!!

A pillar of celestial energy slammed directly into its snout.

Golden scales exploded.

The Titanoboa reeled backward.

For half a second.

Then its head snapped upward.

Its eyes locked onto mine.

Again.

It learned.

Again.

"WHY DOES EVERYTHING SMART TRY TO KILL ME?!"

"Don! Its eyes!" Dune's voice echoed across the battlefield.

Mirage energy exploded around her.

The desert distorted.

Reality fractured.

Suddenly dozens of me appeared.

Hundreds.

Celestial copies sprinted across the battlefield in every direction.

The Titanoboa froze.

Its head moved left.

Right.

Left.

Right.

Trying to identify the real target.

I grinned.

"It's stupid."

Three seconds later every clone exploded.

The snake immediately found me.

"...it's not stupid."

"DID I JUST WATCH DOZENS OF ME GET MURKED?!"

"Focus!" Dune shouted.

The Titanoboa slammed into the ground.

BOOOOOOOOOM!!!

The city cracked apart.

I tumbled into a crater as rivers of sand poured around me.

Then golden venom dripped overhead.

The liquid ignited instantly.

Fire spread everywhere.

The crater became an oven.

"SHIT! IT CAN SPIT FIRE TOO?!"

"WATER WALL!"

Demaurion slammed both hands forward.

A massive wave erupted from nowhere and crashed into the inferno.

Steam detonated across the battlefield.

Visibility vanished.

The Titanoboa charged.

Its gigantic body exploded through the steam cloud like a runaway train.

The entire city shook.

I burst from the smoke.

Panting.

Bleeding.

Daggers glowing brighter than ever.

I pointed one directly at the serpent.

"Okay snakey wakey."

Purple energy erupted around me.

"I'm locked in now."

We moved simultaneously.

The Titanoboa lunged.

I launched forward.

The distance vanished instantly.

Fangs met daggers.

WHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAM!!!

Golden sparks erupted across the sky.

The collision shook the city.

Venom splashed across my hoodie.

Immediately it began melting.

Metal.

Skin.

Everything.

Pain exploded through my chest.

I screamed.

Celestial energy erupted outward.

A glowing barrier formed around me just before the venom reached my heart.

The shield sizzled.

Cracked.

Held.

Barely.

Then the Titanoboa wrapped around me.

Everything disappeared beneath scales.

Pressure crushed my ribs.

My lungs screamed.

My bones creaked.

The world became tighter.

And tighter.

And tighter.

“DON!”

Olsen’s voice sounded distant.

"BRO!"

I clenched my teeth.

Golden light flooded my vision.

Enough.

"CELESTIAL OVERRIDE—IGNITION MODE!"

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!

Light erupted from my body.

The Titanoboa shrieked.

Its coils burst apart.

A shockwave tore through the desert.

Radiant wings exploded from my back.

Burning gold.

Burning violet.

Burning like a star.

The Titanoboa reared above the city.

Lightning flashed through the sandstorm.

Dune raised her staff.

Mirage energy shattered the sky into mirrored layers.

The heavens fractured into thousands of reflections.

The Titanoboa hesitated.

Confused.

Disoriented.

Dune pointed upward.

"FINISH IT!"

I rose into the sky.

Higher.

Higher.

Higher.

Every remaining drop of celestial energy poured into my daggers.

The blades became miniature suns.

Night vanished.
The entire desert lit up like daytime.
The Titanoboa opened its jaws.
Golden fire burned inside its throat.
Then it lunged.
I smiled.
“THIS IS FOR MARKILAO!”
BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!
I dove straight into the inferno.
SLASH!!!
Both daggers plunged deep into its skull.
For one second—
Everything stopped.
Then the celestial explosion happened.
A pillar of violet light erupted into the heavens.
The dunes shook for miles.
Sandstorms vanished.
The clouds split apart.
The city disappeared beneath light.
And when the dust finally settled—
The Titanoboa fell.
Slowly.
Massively.
Like a mountain collapsing.
BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!
Silence returned to Markilao.
I knelt inside the crater.
Smoke rising from my armor.
Blood dripping from my chin.
My daggers buried beside me.
The Titanoboa lay motionless in the distance.

Golden eyes extinguished.

Finally defeated.

Dune approached through the settling dust.

"You fought beyond reason."

I laughed weakly.

"The only thing I'm thinking about..."

I pointed toward the city.

"...is how UNPROTECTED this place is."

For the first time all night—

People laughed.

Then cheered.

Then cried.

The Dunenanites slowly emerged from hiding.

Alive.

Safe.

Still standing.

And as celestial embers drifted across the desert wind, I stared at the city of Markilao and realized something.

Maybe the miracle was never the magic.

Maybe the miracle was the people who refused to disappear.

A Few Hours Later

After Olsen and the others trained to fight Power, when they came back to me at the Pyramid, their results were pretty good. (Archie failed, he gets a re-match). The wind blew through my skin and I already knew that I'm about to go next. I saw Power from afar in the near sand, so I slowly walked towards him through the wind.

The desert at night always felt *too* big.

Stars stretched forever, the dunes rolled like waves, and the air had that still silence that made even breathing sound loud. My shoes crunched into the sand as the wind brushed by, carrying

the scent of dust and moonlight.

Power floated beside me, his aura glowing blue like a tiny star. "Peaceful, right?" he asked.

"Yeah," I said, squinting toward the horizon. "Just ignore the part where we've been walking through sand for an hour straight."

He chuckled. "You're about to forget all about the sand."

I frowned. "What's that supposed to—"

Before I could finish, everything *twisted.* The dunes shattered like glass. The stars flickered and warped. For a split second, I felt like my whole body got yanked through a portal made of lightning.

The world rebuilt itself around me. No more desert. No moonlight. Instead, a city stretched in every direction, skyscrapers gleaming with blue and violet veins of energy. Clouds rippled overhead, glowing faintly like storm clouds waiting to burst.

And me? I was standing sideways on the *side of a building.*

"Wait—WHOA—!" My feet slipped, and I windmilled my arms like a cartoon character trying not to die. The gravity felt all wrong. "Bro, what is—how are we—THIS IS NOT NORMAL!"

Across from me, on the *opposite* skyscraper, Power stood completely chill, arms crossed, aura glowing like a comet. "Relax," he called out, grinning. "My Element can create Domains, artificial spaces for training. Think of it like a hyper-reality battleground. Gravity's just... flexible here."

I clung to a window ledge, glaring at him. "Flexible?! I'm about to *flex* into the pavement if I slip!"

Power laughed. "You'll get used to it. Every part of this place responds to energy, your movement, your aura, even your thoughts."

I glanced down. The "ground" was a thousand feet below,

twisting like liquid light. "Yeah, totally comforting," I muttered.

Then Power raised a hand, the whole city flickered, and suddenly the walls beneath my feet *stabilized.* My shoes gripped firm again.

"Better?" he asked.

I took a cautious step forward, testing it. "Still weird... but yeah."

Power smirked. "Good. Because now that you're balanced—" He slammed his fists together, blue energy exploding from his body, lighting up the entire skyline. "—we train."

My aura flared in response, violet light igniting around me. "Figures," I said, crouching low, grin spreading. "You just couldn't resist showing off."

He shrugged. "What can I say? It's kind of my thing."

The city trembled. Neon lights pulsed.

Two elements, blue and violet, burned through the skyline like twin stars colliding.

And in that suspended city of light, the real battle began.

"GO!"

I blasted off the building, debris bursting into the air in a rippling violet streak, and hurtled toward Power. He darted back, glowing cobalt, a serrated line of energy slicing through the clouds. With a war cry, he swung his fists.

We collided, unleashing a shockwave of violet and blue light that cascaded outward and rattled the entire skyline as our arms flared with energy.

Power grinned.

"GREAT CLASH! BUT THINK FAST!"

His fists blurred.

An uppercut detonated against me, bursting into a blinding flash.

"RAH!"

He spun midair and cracked me across the face, blasting me through the city. My body ripped between towers as celestial energy crackled across my skin.

Power zipped from rooftop to rooftop, ricocheting off every surface with thunderous booms that toppled buildings into clouds of debris.

"BALANCE, DON!" his voice echoed. "BALANCE!"

I backflipped through the smoke, violet energy sparking wildly around me. My feet dug into shattered concrete and skidded to a halt as dust exploded around my legs. I whipped out my daggers and spun them through the air in a blur.

"OKAY THEN!"

I lunged forward with celestial fire blazing from my eyes.

Power's feet slammed into the ground, sending shards of concrete spiraling through the haze. We launched at the same time, energy compressing between us as the distance vanished.

"GRAH!!!"

Our fists collided, detonating a radiant shockwave that painted the storm in violet and blue.

I bent back, gritting my teeth.

"GOT YOU, POWER!"

My daggers danced through the air, violet arcs lashing out with every strike.

He brushed them aside.

"Yeah. Remember, my superhuman strength isn't something you can predict."

WHAM!

A cobalt fist drove straight into my chest.

FWOOM!

The air rippled outward. Rubble lifted from the streets, and I

was hurled backward through a line of buildings.

"AGH! OUCH! OOF! ACK!"

Dust mushroomed into the sky. Windows shattered. Concrete split apart. The city convulsed beneath the destruction as entire structures folded into the chaos.

Everything blurred.

My body spun through the smoky wreckage, clothes torn and scorched from the impacts. I slammed into the ground again and again, each collision erupting another cloud of dirt before I finally rebounded upward and twisted through the air like a wheel of violet light.

Power floated above me, a blue firestorm rolling off his body.

I hit the ground hard and slid through the rubble while celestial energy coiled around my legs and surged into my core.

Then I blinked forward.

The air shredded apart around me with every burst of speed. My wings ignited behind me, eyes glowing through the storm clouds.

Power dove through those same clouds a second later, wrapped in a surge of light-blue fury.

"AGH!"

His punch connected squarely with my face.

I crashed through a skyscraper, shattering glass and bending steel. My body scraped across the trembling floor while Power tore through the tower after me.

"PAY ATTENTION!"

A blinding burst of azure energy erupted from his hands and ripped through the building, splitting floor after floor apart as I plummeted downward.

Pain shot through my body with every impact.

"RAGH!"

I slammed into the earth.

A seismic ring of dust exploded outward and toppled nearby ruins.

Power descended from above, fists glowing and eyes burning.

"WATCH YOUR SURROUNDINGS!"

His foot crashed into my chest.

The resulting shockwave annihilated half the block.

"JUST WATCH THIS!" I shouted back.

He barked out a laugh.

"WATCHING!"

I vanished.

Reappearing behind him, I struck fast.

He twisted and drove an uppercut into my jaw. A kick followed immediately after. I ducked and counterpunched, but he caught my fist, slammed a right hook made of pure plasma into my side, and launched me away in a detonation of light.

I tore through the skyline, demolishing towers in my path.

Power blinked ahead of me, fists radiating heat.

"Fast punches? Try me!"

He unleashed a flurry of lightning-speed blows.

Each strike barely missed as I weaved between them, my body bending with the motion of the wind. I zipped away and rocketed toward the sky, cosmic trails blazing behind me.

He followed.

Blue energy fractured around him like shattered glass.

Midair, he spun his arms and manifested a glowing tendril of energy that lashed out and wrapped around me.

"LEARNED THIS MOVE WHEN I WAS THIRTEEN MILLION YEARS OLD!"

He swung me around like a comet before hurling me through the stratosphere.

I stopped myself in midair just as he streaked toward me, blazing like a meteor.

He struck from every angle.

The sky twisted around us while I absorbed the barrage at impossible speeds. I roared, fists charged with celestial fire, and lunged forward.

"OKAY!"

BOOM!

Our punches collided.

A massive ringed explosion split the heavens apart.

He raised an arm to crush me, but I flickered away.

Hovering in the clouds, I stared him down.

He dashed forward.

I flickered again.

Again.

And again.

We zigzagged through the sky, violet and blue streaks crashing into each other like rival storms until our fists met once more and detonated another shockwave.

He spun into a side kick.

I ducked beneath it.

He lunged upward from below.

I vanished behind him and spiraled through a vortex of cosmic light.

"50-50-50 CELESTIAL DROPKICK!"

My boot connected.

Power blasted through the clouds.

He fell laughing.

"Nice combo! But handle THIS!"

Throwing his arms wide, he unleashed a massive ripple of blue force that shook the heavens.

I launched toward him, fists glowing like twin stars. Celestial energy wrapped around my body as I spiraled through the clouds in a blazing helix.

Power's eyes lit up.

Then he disappeared.

I froze.

Vanished too.

When I reappeared, he was hanging motionless among the clouds.

I roared and bolted forward.

He turned to strike.

Flash.

Gone.

His eyes darted around.

I appeared behind him.

"GRAGH!"

He flinched.

Too late.

I spun around him, celestial energy flaring violently before unleashing a barrage of radiant kicks.

Power dodged through the afterimages.

"Nice fake. Got me for a second!"

He lunged and nearly caught my leg.

"WOAH!"

I flipped backward and dove toward the city below.

Power followed immediately, energy crackling around him.

"SO FAR, YOU'RE PASSING! LET'S SEE YOU HANDLE THIS LEVEL!"

We plummeted through the clouds together, hurling energy blasts as we fell.

The attacks collided midair in rapid detonations.

I spun through the sky, palms glowing as celestial bolts erupted from my hands. Power countered every shot instantly. Violet and blue explosions filled the air between us, lighting up the storm while we continued falling straight toward the city below.

He appeared in front of me, fists drawn.

I blinked beside him, wings unfurled, spun, and drove an elbow into his ribs. The impact launched him across the skyline and straight into a rooftop.

Before he could recover, I teleported behind him.

He was gone.

I turned and spotted him standing on another building, fists sparking with heat as blue energy rolled off his body.

"Passing in reaction time and resilience, kid."

He lunged.

The rooftop exploded beneath his feet as he tore through it. A left hook came flying toward me. I ducked underneath it and drove a front kick into his stomach, launching him skyward.

Celestial energy coiled around my legs.

I blasted upward after him and struck again, sending him even higher in a burst of cosmic light.

Power spun through the air, blue energy swirling around his body. He thrust both hands forward and unleashed a barrage of glowing orbs.

They streaked toward me.

BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The explosions merged together into a raging vortex that swallowed me whole and hurled me across the rooftops.

I skipped across concrete before finally skidding to a stop. Dust and fire rained around me while chunks of debris crashed into the streets below.

Power charged again.

His fists blazed with blue fire as he closed the distance.

I sidestepped.

His punch missed.

I flipped over the next swing and landed behind him.

He attacked again immediately.

Left hook.

Right hook.

No hesitation.

No opening.

I caught his arm and slammed a celestial strike toward his chest.

WHAM!

He deflected it.

The air cracked apart from the shockwave alone.

Power answered with a blazing jab that buried itself into my gut and launched me off the building.

"AGH!"

The city spun around me as I plummeted through open air.

Wind screamed past my ears.

Then I glanced toward the side of a nearby skyscraper and grinned.

"Got it!"

My feet slammed against the wall.

Instead of falling, I sprinted.

Straight down.

The glass tower became my runway as I raced toward the ground, hoodie whipping behind me while the skyline blurred into streaks of color.

Then something blue rolled into view.

Power.

He'd compressed himself into a blazing sphere of energy and was hurtling directly toward me.

I leaped aside.

Celestial fire trailed behind me as the blue orb ripped through the skyscraper wall and crashed into the street below.

BOOOOOOM!

The explosion shook the entire block.

Power exploded out of the crater a second later.

A streak of blue shot through the sky.

Before I could react, his hand wrapped around my arm.

WHAM!

He slammed me through another building.

Glass shattered.

Steel bent.

I tumbled across the floor as debris rained around me.

"GO ON!" he shouted.

Power thrust both palms forward.

A colossal beam of blue light erupted across the city.

I flipped over it.

The beam carved through buildings beneath me as I dashed aside. More blasts followed. I deflected them with celestial mirrors before sliding forward, fists crackling with energy.

Power lunged.

I vaulted over him using one hand.

For a split second, our eyes locked.

Then I burst through the window behind him.

CRASH!

The glass exploded outward.

I spun around and thrust my palm forward.

A tendril of celestial energy lashed through the air and wrapped around his neck.

"GOT YOU!"

I yanked hard.

Power shot backward through the broken window and out into the open sky.

I tightened my grip and spun.

Faster.

Faster.

The celestial tendril whirled around me like a cosmic cyclone while Power swung through the air at the end of it.

My eyes blazed violet.

The energy storm intensified.

Then I brought him down.

BOOOOOOOOM!

Power slammed into the ground.

A massive wave of blue and violet energy swept across the city, rattling windows and shaking buildings for blocks.

Dust swallowed everything.

For a moment, I couldn't see.

Then the smoke cleared.

Power had me pinned.

My face was buried in the dirt while his knee pressed into my back.

Both of us looked destroyed.

His skin was scorched.

My clothes were torn apart.

Cuts covered my arms.

Every breath felt like fire in my lungs.

Power smirked.

"Reaction timing... aerial awareness... area control... velocity... power output... endurance... adaptability..."

His grin widened.

"YOU PASSED!"

I blinked.

"I PASSED?!"

Power laughed.

"YEAH, YOU PASSED!"

Power stepped back, laughing as he threw his arms up.

"It wasn't about winning, Don! It was about adapting—learning in real-time. Archie begged me to stop after three minutes. Olsen lasted longer thanks to that tank build of his, but only scored eighty for reaction speed. Prince? Lightning reflexes and wild AOE—seventy-nine, lacking strength and stamina. Demaurion? He crushed it. Used water so dense it turned solid, even boiled it. Ninety-five! And you? One hundred percent. Dynamic element mastery. Perfect synchronization."

After hearing that, I just grinned—exhausted, bruised, but proud.

Couldn't wait to crash into bed after that test of chaos.

I blinked again, and we were back at the Pyramids of Markilao.

He looked at me and smirked.

"Nice job. Didn't expect that from you," Power admitted.

I smiled, pulling myself up. "I didn't either."

We both laughed. The sky had dimmed while we fought. Stars shimmered. The moon glowed silver. Wind whispered across the dunes, and crickets chirped softly.

I turned toward the pyramid. Its lights were on. I sat down on the sand to stargaze. Power walked back toward the pyramid in silence. "Whatcha doing?" she asked, her gaze turning to meet mine.

"Just enjoying the sky," I replied, still staring up at the stars.

She let out a light laugh. "You Celestianites are really something."

I smirked. "Yeah, I guess we are. What about Dunanites? I'm pretty curious about you guys."

"Oh, us?" she grinned. "There's *so* much I could tell you! We love desserts, playing in the sand, Desert Cats love yarn, we don't have wars anymore, we're peaceful, kind, always having fun... basically, we're the nicest Elementalnites in all of Avangard!"

But then, just like that, her smile faded into a quiet frown.

I glanced over, concern creeping into my voice. "Is something wrong?"

She looked down. "No, it's just... I wish they were still alive."

My heart paused. "What do you mean? Aren't the Dunanites supposed to be the happy ones?"

"Well... half of our tribe is gone. When I said we don't have wars, I meant *now*. Back then, during the Celestianite and Lunaranite War at the Pyramids of Markilao... everyone vanished. I was born in the Sand Dunes, and by then, barely anyone was left. Just me, my mom, and other Dunanites."

She paused, her voice quieter.

"Then the Lunaranites came. They raided the Sand Dunes and the Pyramids... and they took my mother. Dragged her off to Foreshade. They kept her locked away and gave her a few years—just a few—to tell them where the Power Gems were. She was the first Power Gem wielder, chosen by the Zeniths to guard them. She used them to protect our homeland. And then... she was gone."

She lifted her eyes back to the sky, her expression fierce with purpose.

"Since then, I've wanted to save her. That's why when I got my first Element—Sand—I started training. I swore I wouldn't leave until I was ready. But once I am... I'll go after her. I'll bring her back. And when I do, I'll be known as one of the Heroes of

Avangard."

I looked at her, smiling, then returned my eyes to the stars.

"You know... I'm trying to be a Hero of Avangard too. Once we take down King Dreadixz, I'll lead the Celestianites to victory. That's my biggest dream. I want it so bad... just to prove I'm not some little weakling. I *know* it'll be a long road, but..."

I trailed off, watching the stars flicker like little promises.

Ella looked down, then turned toward me. "Do you really think you can?"

I met her eyes. "I *know* I can."

"I'll try my best too..."

She looked back up. "Yeah, right. Don, just... don't give up, okay? Don't let people or life drag you down, no matter how hard it gets. I believe in you. You've got this."

"Yeah, hopefully you'll find your mother..."

✧ #1.7 — The Insane Raid ✧

12:00 AM. Midnight.

And we're already sprinting through the Sand Dunes like we made a personal enemy out of fate.

Why?

Simple.

FORTY LUNARANITE DRAGONS ARE RAIDING THE PLACE.

"WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?!" Olsen screamed, officially spiraling.

"I DON'T KNOW! JUST RUN!" I yelled back.

The sky cracked open.

Meteors tore through the clouds and slammed into the dunes behind us, shockwaves rolling through the sand like earthquakes. The ground buckled under my feet.

We didn't slow down.

Slowing down meant dying.

The wind howled, whipping entire walls of sand into the air. I could barely see my own hands.

Demaurion was right beside us.

Not fighting.

Dragging us out.

"Stay close!" he barked, water energy flaring around his boots as he slammed a hand into the ground.

A wave of compressed sand and mist blasted outward, knocking a Lunaranite clean off its feet behind us.

I tightened my grip on my dagger.

A shape burst from the storm.

A Lunaranite.

Spear raised.

Eyes glowing silver.

I didn't hesitate.

One clean slash across the throat.

Blue-black blood sprayed.

The body collapsed into the sand.

"Keep moving!" Demaurion snapped.

The dunes steepened.

The wind got meaner.

My lungs burned.

Behind us, the attackers weren't just dragons.

Dark Don.

Overbrawl.

And dozens of Lunaranite warriors tearing through the battlefield.

A beam of golden light split the sky.

Celestianites descended through the clouds, wings spread wide, feathers blazing gold and white, spears crackling with light energy.

Dozens of them.

Maybe a hundred.

Reinforcements.

Actual, no-joke reinforcements.

Their leader hovered above the chaos.

"GET OUT OF HERE, KIDS! WE'LL HOLD THEM!"

Half the Lunaranites peeled off and charged us anyway.

The Celestianites collided with them midair.

Everything exploded into chaos.

Steel crashing against steel.

Wings slamming together.

Bodies crashing into the dunes.

"THANK YOU!" Ella yelled as we ran.

Something flew toward us.

I caught it.

A coin.

Gold and white.

Warm like it was alive.

"What is this?!" I shouted.

"THINK OF WHERE YOU WANT TO GO AND THROW IT!" a Celestianite yelled back. "SOMEWHERE SAFE!"

My thoughts raced.

Thunderstark Kingdom.

The Gadian Sea.

Anywhere that wasn't here.

"THUNDERSTARK KINGDOM!" Olsen shouted. "IT'S SAFE! AS LONG AS WE DON'T TOUCH ELECTRICITY!"

Demaurion didn't hesitate.

"Do it. Now."

His hand tightened around my shoulder.

I clenched my jaw and hurled the coin.

Golden light exploded outward.

The portal unfolded like a burning ring suspended in space. Its edges crackled with celestial energy as a glimpse of the Thunderstark Kingdom appeared beyond it.

Dark blue skies.

Endless storms.

Lightning crawling through the clouds like living veins.

Then Dark Don moved.

He shot forward like a missile.

The Lunar Lance screamed through the air as silver arcs of moonlight spiraled around the weapon, leaving glowing ribbons across the battlefield.

A smirk stretched across his face.

"Finally."

His eyes locked onto mine.

"The one I've been hunting."

"SERIOUSLY?!"

I ripped out my second dagger.

Prince froze.

"DON! THIS IS NOT WORTH A WING!"

"IT'S OKAY!"

I pointed toward the portal.

"GO!"

Without another word, everyone dove through.

Here's the same scene with the arm removal replaced by a neck slash from the Lunar Lance fight, fewer em-dashes, and the flow cleaned up while keeping your style, dialogue, and sequence intact.

I turned back, planting my feet on the scorched ground. My irises shimmered violet, radiating power.

Dark Don lunged.

I pivoted and kicked him aside, spinning upright with both blades drawn.

"Don't waste my time, Dark Don. I've got places to be," I growled.

He grinned like the devil.

"Thunderstark Kingdom? We'll follow you there."

His Lunar Lance hissed as he summoned it. Silver energy

spiraled around the weapon as moonlight crawled along its surface.

We locked eyes.

Pure tension.

"You ready?" he asked, his aura fizzing with lunar static.

I narrowed my gaze.

"Born ready."

He launched the first strike, twisting into a vicious thrust.

I ducked and swung into a spinning kick that cracked across his skull.

WHAM!

He reeled backward.

I darted behind him and carved across his ribs with one of my daggers.

Dark Don spun instantly, his Lunar Lance sweeping through the air. The weapon nearly caught me across the chest as I jumped back.

I blurred forward.

Blows flew from every angle, but the lance intercepted most of them.

SHING! SHING! SHING!

Sparks erupted as steel clashed against lunar energy.

I zig-zagged around him, nicking his jaw before sweeping behind him and going for his knees.

I dropped low.

Spin Drop.

My signature move slammed into him and launched him backward like a ragdoll.

"COME ON!" I roared, leaping after him.

Dark Don recovered quickly. He swung the Lunar Lance in a wide arc, forcing me back.

The blade missed my throat by inches.

I intercepted the next strike with a dagger.

CLANG!

But he immediately drove a lunar-charged punch into my face.

WHAM!

I tumbled across the battlefield and slammed into a boulder.

Debris exploded around me.

Before I could recover, he warped forward and smacked me across the jaw like I owed him money.

We circled each other, breathing heavily.

"You're strong," he muttered, eyes sharp.

"I've always been strong," I snapped.

He tilted his head.

"Where's that confidence come from?"

I grinned.

"I believe in myself. You should try it sometime."

I dashed forward and flung a dagger.

He sidestepped.

Exactly what I wanted.

I lunged in and Celestial PUNCHED him square in the face.

BOOM!

The impact blasted him backward like he'd been hit by a meteor.

I pressed the assault immediately.

Slashes ripped through the air.

He countered.

I parried.

I spun, struck, dodged, then struck again.

Blade against lance.

Speed against savagery.

Roundhouse.

Miss.

Backhand slash.

Parried.

I feinted, spun low, and nicked his lip clean.

Then I went full light-speed mode.

I blinked around him like a glitch in reality.

One moment I was in front of him.

The next I was behind him.

Then above him.

Then beside him.

He couldn't keep up.

SLASH!

A cut opened across his chest.

"RAHH!" I bellowed.

I hurled my second dagger.

He knocked it away with the shaft of the Lunar Lance.

I lunged immediately afterward and hammered a Celestial Uppercut into his jaw.

WHAM!

Dark Don left the ground.

I jumped after him.

A heel kick launched him even higher.

Then I blinked above him and drove a Celestial Slam directly into his spine.

BOOOOOOOM!

He crashed into the battlefield like thunder.

The ground shattered beneath him.

Then came the 50-50-50 Celestial Dropkick.

WHAAAAAAAAAM!

My feet slammed into his chest.

Dark Don bounced across the sand, coughing up blood as he

struggled to rise.

Dazed.

Disoriented.

Stunned.

I caught my daggers as they returned to my hands, their blades glinting beneath the moonlight.

Dark Don forced himself upright.

His Lunar Lance trembled in his grip.

I vanished.

FLASH!

His eyes widened.

Too late.

SHING!

Both daggers sliced across the side of his neck in a clean X-shaped strike.

Not deep enough to kill.

More than deep enough to shock him.

Dark Don froze.

His hand immediately flew to his neck.

Silver blood trickled between his fingers.

His eyes locked onto mine.

Confusion.

Shock.

Disbelief.

For the first time since I'd met him, he looked genuinely rattled.

Like he couldn't comprehend what had just happened.

I lowered my daggers.

"Yeah," I said. "That's what I thought."

Dark Don stared for another second.

Then his body flickered.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

And vanished in a burst of lunar light.

Gone.

Just like that.

I turned to see Power throwing hands with Overbrawl while the Celestianites clashed in full force against the Lunaranites.

And oh yeah.

We were winning.

Hard.

I stretched, popped my knuckles, and smirked.

"Time to clean house."

"Time to clean the house."

Violet lightning cracked across my eyes.

Then I moved.

The battlefield exploded into motion as I launched myself straight into the heart of the warzone, my shoes ripping trenches through the sand while thousands of Lunaranites surged forward like a living tidal wave.

Behind me, the entire desert suddenly shook.

Power and Overbrawl collided.

Blue and scarlet-orange energy erupted across the horizon, splitting the sky apart as two godlike figures crashed into each other hard enough to send shockwaves rolling across the dunes for miles.

Nobody had time to watch.

Because I was already inside the army.

My daggers flashed.

One Lunaranite rushed me.

I slipped past him.

His body kept running.

His head didn't.

Another lunged from the side.

I spun beneath the strike and drove a dagger upward.

A third came from above.

I grabbed his arm, flipped him over my shoulder, and launched him through three others before kicking all four into a cluster of soldiers charging from behind.

Bodies scattered across the battlefield.

Sand spiraled around me.

And I just kept moving.

Every step became another attack.

Every attack became another knockout.

Every knockout became another opening.

The battlefield transformed into a blur of violet light streaking through a sea of silver armor.

I leapt.

Spun.

Dropped.

A devastating Spin Drop crashed into the center of a charging battalion and sent dozens of Lunaranites flying outward as a crater exploded beneath my feet.

The impact wave flattened everything nearby.

I didn't stop.

I couldn't.

The moment I landed, both daggers left my hands.

They became twin streaks of celestial energy.

Two direct hits.

Two enemies dropped.

The blades curved through the air before snapping back into my palms.

I caught them without looking.

Then vanished again.

A dragon swooped overhead.

I jumped.

The air shattered beneath me as I rocketed upward like a missile and slammed straight into its jaw.

The beast's head snapped backward.

I grabbed one of its horns.

Twisted.

And hurled the entire creature into a squadron descending from the clouds.

The collision erupted like a bomb.

The sky filled with debris.

Then the desert shook again.

Far away, a blue beam and a scarlet-orange beam collided and carved a canyon through the horizon as Power and Overbrawl continued their war.

The shockwave reached us seconds later.

Sand exploded upward.

The Lunaranites stumbled.

I smiled.

Perfect.

I dropped into the crowd.

And went insane.

My daggers became streaks of silver and violet.

Every movement flowed into the next.

Slash.

Kick.

Spin.

Stab.

Elbow.

Dropkick.

Aerial flip.

Celestial Uppercut.

Bodies flew in every direction as celestial energy exploded around me like miniature supernovas.

The soldiers weren't fighting one person anymore.

They were fighting a storm.

Then I stopped.

The battlefield froze.

Hundreds of Lunaranites surrounded me from every direction.

Rows and rows of soldiers.

Dragons overhead.

Weapons raised.

Ready to overwhelm me through sheer numbers.

I slowly looked around.

My violet eyes glowed brighter.

"Why do you people keep trying?"

Nobody answered.

The desert wind howled between us.

I cracked my neck.

"I've already erased half your army."

Silence.

Then I raised both hands.

A tiny spark flickered between my palms.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

Each pulse grew brighter.

Hotter.

Violent.

The air around me warped.

The soldiers backed away.

The dragons hesitated.

The energy continued growing.

Growing.

Growing.

Until it felt like I was holding a newborn star.

Then I looked up.

And grinned.

"I'LL GIVE YOU SOMETHING TO REMEMBER!"

Light swallowed the battlefield.

Ten celestial mirrors exploded into existence around the desert.

The world instantly became violet.

Then I disappeared.

The mirrors ignited.

And suddenly there were hundreds of me.

Thousands.

Afterimages bounced between the mirrors at impossible speeds, turning the battlefield into a maze of celestial light and phantom movements.

The Lunaranites swung wildly.

Hit nothing.

Turned.

Missed again.

Then I struck.

A single punch detonated against one soldier's face with enough force to split the ground beneath him.

Before he even hit the floor, I was already somewhere else.

And somewhere else.

And somewhere else.

The battlefield transformed into pure chaos as celestial

streaks ricocheted through the army faster than anyone could process.

Then I appeared high above everything.

The desert.

The army.

The war.

Even Power and Overbrawl paused for a fraction of a second.

My fists glowed like miniature galaxies.

I pulled both arms back.

And roared.

"365 DAYS!"

Ten colossal celestial fists materialized above the battlefield.

For one terrifying second, their shadows covered the entire army.

Then they fell.

The desert erupted.

Massive impacts hammered the battlefield one after another, each strike launching soldiers, dragons, sand, and stone into the sky as the entire kingdom shook beneath the barrage.

The final fist landed.

And I followed it.

A violet comet descending from the heavens.

My body became pure celestial energy.

The last remaining dragon looked up.

Too late.

BOOM.

The impact swallowed everything.

Sand blasted outward.

The sky split apart.

The shockwave raced across the dunes and collided with the distant battle between Power and Overbrawl, causing another

violent eruption of blue and scarlet energy across the horizon.

When the dust finally began to settle—

The army was gone.

Silence spread across the battlefield.

Only scorched sand remained.

Broken armor.

Defeated soldiers.

And me.

Standing alone at the center.

Celestial energy crackled wildly across my body while my chest rose and fell.

My heart hammered against my ribs.

Not from fear.

Not from exhaustion.

From adrenaline.

Slowly, the Celestianites turned toward me.

One by one.

Speechless.

Power stood among them now.

Overbrawl had already fallen.

Even Power looked impressed.

The battlefield that moments ago contained an entire invading force now looked like it had been hit by a celestial apocalypse.

One of the baffled Celestianites walked up to me, wide-eyed.

"Th-there's no way *you*, a 12-year-old, just wiped out like... 140 Lunaranites in a few minutes?! Who even *taught* him this stuff?!"

Another Celestianite leaned toward the one beside him and whispered, "Told you he'd win. Now pay up."

"He's crystallized too..." one muttered, stunned.

"I've never seen a young Crystallized Celestianite take down

an army of Lunaranites *and* Dark Don in one go."

"I'm surprised too."

"You think he's gonna be our next leader after Vigilzante?"

"Isn't he part of the prophecy?"

"Where are his parents?"

"He's becoming a Hero, I just *know* it."

That's when Power strolled into the middle of the crowd, standing next to me like the main character in a war movie.

"Alright, everybody chill out," he said, waving a hand. "I taught him that stuff. Well... most of it. He picked up some tricks when he was younger too."

He glanced around. "Now clear out. We got somewhere to be."

Suddenly, Overbrawl staggered to his feet. He clutched his scarf, his teeth clenched so hard it looked like they might shatter.

Then—bam! He fired an orange energy dart right in front of us. A vortex exploded open, swirling and twisting until it morphed into a glowing portal. Without warning, he swiped his arm forward, creating a shockwave that *yeeted* us straight through.

And then...

we were falling.

FROM. THE. SKY.

We plunged through thick, foggy gray clouds, the air buzzing with static. Thunder cracked like it was screaming at us, and lightning tore through the sky like it was trying to start a fight.

Rain pelted us. Hard. It felt like the sky was throwing cold punches.

"AH! AHHHHHH! WE'RE FALLING AT AN UNIMAGINABLE HEIGHT THAT I CAN'T SUSTAIN KEEPING CALM!!!" I yelled mid-air, twisting toward Power, who was also plummeting like

it was a casual Tuesday.

Power looked down, his face getting serious fast. We finally broke through the bottom of the clouds and saw where we were headed:

Straight into a pool of pure lightning.

Yup. A giant crackling pit of blue-white electricity, surrounded by dark rocky terrain, jagged mountains, and some... things.

Great. Just great.

Power didn't answer, which meant we were probably about to die.

I squeezed my eyes shut and braced for pain—but instead, I felt this weird tingly, soft sensation. Like static mixed with feathers?

Suddenly, I heard a warping sound—

BAM!

Face-first into the rocky ground.

Power and I groaned as we got up and looked around, dazed.

"We ain't dead...?" I mumbled, shaking off the fall. "I mean of course you're not dead, you're literally superman times ten with extra stats plus hacks."

Rain was still hammering down, thunder still yelling, lightning still doing its electric temper tantrum.

Then I saw them.

Creatures. Big ones. Small ones.

Never seen anything like 'em.

One caught my eye: it was massive, armored in cracked dark plating with glowing energy snaking through the fractures like molten lightning. Its jagged face looked born from nightmares, its arms were radiating raw energy—and debris was levitating around it like gravity was taking a nap. The entire atmosphere

buzzed like a live wire.

No doubt.

That thing was using the Lightning Element.

And then it hit me.

Zirixes.

Only rock-eating lightning creatures native to one place:

The Thunderstark Kingdom.

Most were small, but a few were massive, and *we* were smack dab in their territory.

That's when I spotted everyone, huddled inside a small glowing-blue cave in the distance, hiding from the storm. Through the thunder and rain, Power turned to me, pulling on a ripped gray cloak.

"Let's get in."

We trudged forward, rain soaking us to the bone, thunder roaring like the gods were arguing.

Inside, the cave was dim and cool, a little haven of calm in the chaos. I plopped down next to Archie and the others—Olsen, Prince, Demaurion, Ella...

And wait—"ANGEL?!"

There he was, sitting cross-legged like he hadn't just been pulled into a full-on cave battle. His soft blue jacket looked like it came straight from a science lab catalog, gray jeans slightly rumpled, and his glasses sliding down his nose just a bit. Blue owl ears twitched atop his head, talon-like feet tapping like he was running calculations, and his folded, shimmering wings shimmered like he'd been analyzing light refraction all day.

"You're here too? How?!"

Angel, Portal Element Electronite. Cool nerd vibes, lowkey awesome, always three steps ahead in calculations and five steps ahead in sarcasm.

"I... uh, was conducting some observational studies in this cave, you know, until someone decided my privacy protocols were irrelevant," he said, adjusting his glasses with a precise finger tap.

"Your privacy doesn't matter," Archie muttered.

Angel's eyes narrowed behind the lenses. "Just as your... empirically invalid opinion doesn't factor into the current situational analysis," he shot back, voice calm but laced with the tiniest trace of superior logic.

I was about to argue, but—

Boom.

Curiosity literally smacked me across the face.

"Angel," I asked, hesitating, "why do you want to be a Hero of Avangard, if you even *want* to?"

Angel's eyes widened like I'd just asked him to explain quantum physics using only interpretive dance. He looked down, fiddling with a small clasp on his jacket. Sighing, he adjusted his glasses and finally looked back up at me, voice measured and nerdy with that weirdly compelling calm.

"For my future. And not just in some abstract sense," he began, fingers drumming a rhythm only he seemed to hear, like he was coding some mental algorithm. "I mean... practically speaking, I want to ensure maximum safety outcomes for Avangardians. Statistically minimize casualties. Optimize quality-of-life variables. Also—monetary gain, if feasible, to redistribute resources to struggling populations in the Rufty Mountains. Because equity isn't just morally correct; it's statistically beneficial for societal stability."

I blinked. Yep. Nerd alert. Full-on.

"Helpless Avangardians can't remain helpless. Variables must be controlled, inputs optimized, failures minimized." He tucked

a stray strand of blue hair behind his owl ear, looking almost smug but mostly... scientific.

I see it now. Everyone wants to become a Hero of Avangard for a reason—but Angel's reason is like he ran the numbers and concluded the universe *demands* it.

"I remember... when I was five," he continued, voice dropping into nostalgic lecture mode, "I was a little Narian Miner. Loved the job, very hands-on, very empirical. But the profession deteriorated—data shows increasing hazard exposure and decreasing oversight. Young miners now face dangerous conditions due to cost-cutting and poor protocol enforcement. Morbidity and attrition rates skyrocketed. Witnessing these variables affect long-term outcomes was... disheartening. Thus, optimizing societal infrastructure and resource distribution became a personal mandate. Make life equitable. Reduce unnecessary risk. Maximize happiness indexes. That's why I want to become a Hero of Avangard."

He paused, squinting at Archie, who was idly igniting a little campfire that floated midair, casting flickering shadows on the cave walls.

It crackled, and it gave us warmth. I sighed, "This feels great."

That was until I noticed Demaurion sitting right next to Archie. He was holding his Trident, and it had 8 Leviathan meat stabbed through the top. I smiled at him knowing that he killed the Leviathan on his own.

He took them out, and he threw the meat at the fire. The meat started to slowly cook, and I stretched my arms and wings. The Thunderstorm out there was still going on, but I could feel peaceful here. Power turned his head to me with a proud smile,

"Don, it's pretty astonishing for you to defeat Dark Don and the entire Lunaranite Army on your own." "You're getting

stronger," he rubbed my head. "I know," I said looking down. Prince lay back, "You know, I heard that there was a Power Gem in the Thunderstark Castle. I was thinking—maybe we could take it for our adventures. I mean, we're the Chosen Ones so nothing could go wrong."

Ella chuckled, "Prince, the moment you say something like that, someone has already lost their entire family and they're now living with no home while in debt."

"But I'm sure we'd be okay." I looked at the two with a smile, "Let's just make a plan tomorrow. We sneak into the castle and we take the Power Gem, that way we can be ready to fight the next beast that comes in our way!"

At Foreshade

I stood at the cliff's edge.

Foreshade sprawled beneath me, thick black fog twisting like it knew me. My boots dug into stone. Wings folded tight, heavy. Not rest. Restraint.

I breathed in.

Cold. Clean. Sharp.

"I never... understood," I whispered.

Her words. The ones she almost said. The ones she left behind like smoke. Fading. Almost nothing.

Silicia.

Her name made something ache inside me. Not pain, exactly. More like a question that kept folding in on itself, impossible to answer.

"What did you mean?" I asked the empty wind. "What did you *want me to promise?*"

The memory came back in fragments. A smile that didn't reach her eyes. A hand that didn't leave mine long enough to feel safe. A voice, soft, urgent, like it was being swallowed before it reached me.

"...don't let—"

That was all. That was it. And somehow, it shattered everything.

I swallowed hard, trying to piece it together. Don't let... what? Don't let it happen again? Don't let them win? Don't let me break?

Every scenario twisted in my head, every possibility bleeding into another.

Her death hadn't been random. She hadn't died to teach me rage. She had left me instructions, a promise, and I couldn't figure out what it was.

The fog below churned as my lunar energy sparked faintly, reacting to the tension in me. My claws scraped the stone. I tried to remember her voice, the cadence, the pause, every subtle hint she had left behind.

"She wouldn't lie to me," I said, voice tight. "She wouldn't demand vengeance... but she *did* want something. She trusted me with it."

I clenched my jaw.

Her last expression. Not anger. Not fear. Just... weight. Like she knew I'd have to carry something bigger than me. Something I wasn't ready for.

Was it to protect them? To save someone? To stop someone like me?

I closed my eyes, letting the memories drag me down. The gunshot. The scream. Her eyes wide and impossible to forget.

"I failed if I don't understand," I muttered. "I can't... I can't

leave it unfinished."

The wind picked up. My wings twitched, ready to erupt. Not because of rage. Not yet. Because her promise demanded focus.

"She needed me to... *do something,*" I said. "Something right. Something that matters."

I thought of Don. The future leader of the Celestianites. Innocent. Unaware. Potentially the key to keeping her promise alive, or destroying it.

Killing him? Sparing him? Every angle tangled into the question that haunted me: *What would Silicia have wanted me to do?*

I stepped closer to the cliff's edge, toes brushing stone. I wanted to scream. I wanted to throw myself into the fog just to escape the weight of it.

But the thought of her gaze, her quiet demand, kept me from moving.

"She wouldn't want this chaos," I whispered. "She wanted... *something else.* And I have to find it before I make the wrong choice."

The sun sliced through the clouds in a narrow blade, gold like a question mark in the dark. I stared at it. It felt like the only thing in the world trying to tell me the answer.

But it didn't.

And so I waited. And thought. And cursed myself for every second I didn't understand.

Because until I discovered her last words, until I knew what she truly meant, until I kept my promise—even in silence—there was no justice. There was no peace.

There was only me.

And the question.

At the Enchanted Kingdom of Celestia

BOOM.

A building collapsed.

Fire erupted. Glass shattered. The city screamed.

And I stepped through the smoke.

Dark Don.

I moved.

Lunar energy detonated around me as I tore through the streets in a violent blur of white light, carving through walls, flickering across rooftops, ripping through avenues like the city itself was in my way. Celestianites scattered, running, screaming, panicking.

Good.

That's how Lunaranites sounded.

I didn't slow. Didn't hesitate. I skidded up the side of a tower and launched into the air, landing hard on a rooftop as the city burned beneath me. Lunar energy danced across my armor. My fists clenched.

The Room of Zeniths loomed in the distance.

I smiled.

Not wide. Not proud.

Just enough.

I spun my lance and moved again. Buildings split like paper. CRASH. Debris rained down. Flames crawled skyward. Guards rushed in, armed, shaking, irrelevant.

"Stop him!"

I didn't answer.

One step. One strike. Lunar light tore through them. Bodies hit the ground before their screams finished forming.

The city was mine now.

A bullet came, predictable. I slid aside and fired back. BLAM. The guard slammed into stone, lifeless. I vaulted over a shattered pillar and unleashed a massive lunar beam. Entire blocks folded inward, crushed under white energy.

I landed again. Charged my lance. Drove it into the ground.

A dome of lunar force exploded outward, clean, efficient, devastating.

Silence followed.

I walked through the wreckage calmly, flames licking at my boots, smoke curling around my wings. Cars were twisted. Streets cracked. Celestianites hid where Lunaranites once begged.

"This is an announcement," my voice carried, steady and cold. "You don't get to pretend anymore."

I turned slowly, eyes glowing.

"You enslaved us. You butchered us. You killed her."

Fire hissed from my nostrils. One sweep of my arm sent a lunar blast tearing through the street, scattering everything in its path.

"Killing one leader won't fix this," I said. "Killing a symbol won't hurt enough."

A voice shouted from behind a burning car. "Y-you're just a kid!"

I looked at him.

The car split in half.

So did he.

The street went dead silent.

Ash drifted. Smoke rose. I surveyed what was left—broken, empty, burning.

"Anyone else," I asked quietly, "want to defend what you did?"

No one spoke.

I nodded.

Good.

White light swallowed me as I vanished, leaving nothing behind but ruin—and the truth I'd finally accepted:

This wasn't just revenge anymore.

It was payback.

And somewhere deep down, where memory should have been, I told myself Silicia wanted this too.

That lie followed me into the light.

✧ #1.8 — Thunderstark Heist ✧

12 Hours Later

We woke up. I grabbed my daggers, threw on my hoodie, and everyone geared up. The sun was blazing, and the sky was finally a clear, brilliant blue. The clouds were snowy white, gliding slowly but gracefully across the horizon. We stepped out of the caves, locked in and fully prepped for the next quest.

Steal that Power Gem.

Defeat the next beast that dares to stand in our way.

I turned back to my crew and smirked.

"Y'all ready?"

"Oh hell yeah, we are!" Archie said, fire sparking in his palms.

We strolled into the dark blue valley and made our way toward the kingdom. The Zirixes were out and about, calm, peaceful, and just vibin' like always.

As we moved deeper into Thunderstark Kingdom, we hit the crowded district. The noise was unreal—people shouting, chatting, trading. The air was basically made of static from all the voices bouncing around.

I had my ear pods in this time, blasting musicfrom Sage

Against the Magic.

I was just grooving, throwing in some dance moves, moving my legs to the beat, bobbing my head. At the drop? Yeah, I full-on default danced. I know it's 2025, but some things are sacred.

I swayed my tail, hit the Woah, and completely owned the street like it was a concert stage. Genius-level song choice, not gonna lie.

Mid-walk, I broke into a quick breakdance spin and casually flipped back into stride like it was nothing. Eyes closed, music blasting. Didn't notice a single thing.

BAM.

Olsen punched the STARS OUT OF ME.

I snapped back, shaking my head, spotting my air pods on the ground. Olsen was glaring.

"Listening to Sage Against the Magic again, huh?"

I puffed, smoke flaring from my nose, "Ugh, I was almost done with it!"

"Focus on the mission. We're sneaking into Thunderstark's Castle *tonight.* Right now, we're just grabbing food," Power explained.

We wandered through rows of market tents packed tight together. So many Electronites bustling around.

"Hey, I'll take two pieces of bread, please."

"Thanks!"

"Can I trade this sword for your shield?"

"I'll give you my cows for your pigs."

"How much for these vegetables?"

"An Electronite banner? Sweet!"

"15 gold for those chickens."

"I'll pay 50 gold for a pet Zirix."

The tents were ragged, held up by crooked wooden poles. Stands everywhere—piled with weapons, food, animals, you name it. Sacks of corn, meat, bread, blueberries—

BLUEBERRIES?!

Okay, pause. You need to know something about me. I have a *wild* relationship with blueberries.

Like, intense.

I love *all* berries, except strawberries (don't ask), but this stand? This glorious *blue* stand? It had *every* berry. Blueberries, raspberries, blackberries. A berry buffet.

See, I'm a weird dragon. Supposed to be all meat-eater, big bad Celestianite warrior and all. But blueberries? That sweet, juicy taste? Bro, it's everything.

And when I say I go wild, I mean *feral.*

Back in Insane Middle School, they served meat and veggies, but I locked eyes on the berries like a predator. Instincts took over. I *acted up.* Full beast mode for a few juicy blue balls (pause).

But I'm trying to be better. A leader. Civilized. Mature. Prophecy member and all that.

So I crossed my arms and tried to resist the stand. Olsen was paying for food, rich boy energy from his parents' gold, and I kept glancing at the berries.

Each look made my mouth water. Every berry stared back at me like, *"Eat us."*

My instincts screamed, "TACKLE THE SACKS. DEVOUR THE FRUIT. UNLEASH THE BEAST." I started shaking. And then... the berries spoke. In a soft, seductive voice:

"Come on, dragon boy... you know you want it~"

I did. I really did. But I held firm.

Until they whispered again:

"Don~ just one bite before the seller leaves... just one~"

I took a deep breath. Intrusive thoughts kicked in, hard.

All I heard in my head was: "EAT THE BERRIES. EAT THE BERRIES. FEAST, KING."

"I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE!!!" I screamed. I transformed into my Celestianite Dragon form and sprinted on all fours. I *lunged* at the berry stand, *obliterating* it. Slashed open the sacks. Berries poured out like a fruity waterfall. I made a giant mouthful and went *feral.* The whole place went into panic mode. People screamed. Ran.

Did I care? Nope. I was deep in berry bliss. Thrashing, chomping, tearing through every juicy orb like a beast possessed.

I roared, "I NEED MORE!!"

I *demolished* more stands.

I *plowed* through berry stalls like a bulldozer on a sugar rush.

Made a mountain of berries and consumed it like a madman.

I didn't stop 'til there was nothing left.

Then I flopped on my belly, groaning. My face was covered in berry goop, red, black, blue. A mess. "Ugh... I think I ate too many..." I groaned, wings stretching out. Olsen just stood there, eyes closed, breathing deep, looking equal parts disappointed and dead inside.

Then he glared at me.

"What did we *both agree on,* when it came to BERRIES?"

I chuckled nervously.

"Uhh... don't ask, its Don logic."

Back in the Cave

The time was 5:00 PM, and the thunderstorm had officially crashed the party. The kingdom's lights flickered off like someone flipped the master switch, and just like that, the power was gone. Rain slammed down in sheets, it was showering. We were already holed up inside the cave, finishing off the last of

the Leviathan meat.

That stuff had to be cooked for a whole day, minimum. Any less and we were playing with our lives—because who knows what ancient cosmic bacteria lives in a creature that's probably older than time. The meat turned out alright, though. Juicy, with that deep-ocean flavor, and the roasted blue scales? Crunchy as heck. Hot, but not too hot. Soft and crunchy at the same time. Honestly? Not bad. I'd eat it again. Olsen even brought bread for the squad, and a little bonus—some blueberries, just for me.

Personally, I didn't feel like I *deserved* them, but let's be real... I will *never* say no to a blueberry. I transformed into my dragon form, and in 2 milliseconds flat, the whole sack was history. Speed snackin'. The bread had a dusting of spices to keep it from being too basic, and we even had marshmallows to roast. Olsen tried his best, but man absolutely torched his. Thing turned into a crisp fossil. Archie's fire does *not* mess around.

By 6:00 PM, we were all full, groggy, and slowly easing into food comas. I leaned back, looked up, and asked the question on everyone's mind.

"So how the hell do we sneak in? This is not Mission Impossible: Castle Edition because that place is locked down tighter than my hoodie drawstrings on a windy day."

Archie raised an eyebrow. "Also... like, what's the *point*?"

The whole squad looked at him like he'd just asked *why water's wet*. Prince blinked dramatically and spoke up:

"Dude. King Thunderstark is *still alive*. After going toe-to-toe with the Musinites, Flamenites, Oceananites, *and* Mechanites. If he's still breathing, who knows what he's scheming next?"

Demaurion took a savage bite of Leviathan meat, like he was staring the actual Leviathan in the face while doing it.

"He stole the gem 15 years ago. But claims to have taken

it for Scientific Electronite Owl purposes which is something Electronites still believe in. Angel's the smartest one here. Why can't *he* figure it out?"

Angel rolled his eyes so hard I thought they might fall out. Adjusting his glasses, he gave me a look, then addressed the group.

"Listen up. This is gonna be the best plan we've ever pulled off."

He narrowed his eyes. Game mode: *activated*.

The Plan

"Don and Olsen, you're up first. Don's got agility and insane Celestial energy. Olsen's got brute strength and Earth Element backup. The front door's always locked, too tough to break, unless you've got *him*. Olsen can force it open while Don cracks the codes using his Celestial abilities. Just don't use anything lunar-based, or it might mess with the systems.

Once they're in, they'll head to the Electro Knight room. Problem: invisible electric lasers. One wrong move, and ZZZAP, alarm city. That's where Prince comes in. He weaves through the lasers, presses the deactivation button. Boom, lasers gone. But the noise might wake the knights, and that's when Demaurion goes full water beast mode and wipes them out before they can snitch.

Then come the stairs. Ella, Power, and I take the back route. I'll cut the right cords to shut down the surveillance cameras. Ella watches our backs. Power uses the tracking tablet to guide the others toward the Power Gem.

Now, once you reach the silver-blue gates—yeah, *those* gates—the Power Gem's last line of defense? Archie scorches them down with his flames. No problem. Gem secured. I make a portal. Boom. We bounce. Mission complete, no L's taken."

We sat in silence for a moment, letting the plan settle in our stomachs like the Leviathan meat.

"So when's this going down?" Olsen asked, his face lit by the flicker of stormlight.

Angel gave that little evil genius grin.

"Midnight. 12:00 AM sharp."

Outside, the storm was just getting warmed up. Thunder cracked like the sky was breaking apart, and the wind howled through the cave entrance. Nature was doing the most. We knew sleep wouldn't come easy, but we had to try. I curled into my dragon form and closed my eyes.

"Get ready, guys... 12:00 AM."

12:00 AM

I woke up to the sharp BOOM of thunder, rattling the cave walls, and groggily shook my head. I was still in my dragon form, and I looked outside into the storm.

Is there still chaos out there?, I thought to myself, scanning the sky for any sign of movement. I glanced around the cave; everyone else was still asleep. That meant it was time for my Celestianite roar.

Now, I won't lie—it wasn't the loudest roar ever, but it was definitely menacing. The Electronites, thankfully, were deep sleepers, so they wouldn't hear it. I opened my mouth and let out a roar that sounded like a mix between a velociraptor and a tyrannosaurus. It echoed through the cave, and everyone shot up, startled by the horrifying noise.

Olsen opened his mouth to speak, but I cut him off, "Olsen, you yawned so loud last time that the whole cave shook. Stay

silent."

Olsen closed his mouth, and everyone else slowly roused. Angel's owl wings fluttered open, and he pulled out a few red walkie-talkies. He spread them across the ground, and Prince grabbed one, raising an eyebrow. "What's this for?"

Angel gave him a deadpan look. "To contact you guys while you're sneaking in. And before we start, we need to play some Mission Impossible music."

I dug around in my pockets and pulled out my AirPods. "Yeah, I've got it," I said, transforming back into my base form. I handed the AirPods to Angel, who switched the setting to "3," and the familiar intro music started blaring in the background.

With the theme song pumping through the speakers, we moved out. Olsen and I crept quietly from the cave, making our way toward the castle. The others positioned themselves accordingly. The castle loomed ahead, towering above us with its sleek blue, metallic exterior. Black and yellow streaks ran across the surface, and the place was dotted with both tall and short towers.

We exchanged a quick smirk, then I turned toward the door, pulling out my daggers. The entrance was a cybernetic door, made of solid titanium, with a thin line dividing it down the center. Locked, no code. Olsen grinned.

"*OoOooOoOoooO*, a locked door," he said, cracking his knuckles.

With that, Olsen stepped up and punched the door with enough force to send sparks flying, bits of metal raining down on us. I raised my hand in approval. "Nice bro," I said with a grin.

We stepped into the throne room, but things got tricky real fast. The room was massive, bathed in a shimmering electric blue glow. Six towering pillars lined both sides of the room, their

surfaces gleaming under the moonlight. At the far end of the room, there was a giant black throne with yellow electric streaks running across it.

"Great, now what?" I muttered, searching for a door with a combination lock.

My walkie-talkie crackled to life, and Angel's voice came through.

"You just need to find it. Got anything that could help?"

"I think I do," I said, my eyes crackling with celestial energy. I activated a power I'd never used before—Overviewing. It's like x-ray vision. Most Celestianites get it once they turn 10, but I got mines when I turned eight. It lets me see through solid objects. I focused, and the entire room shimmered in shades of celestial purple and blue.

I scanned the area, and then I saw it. The door with the combination lock was on the ceiling.

Why the roof?!

I turned to Olsen and deactivated my ability. "Great, it's up there. Now we need to figure out how to get up there."

Olsen tilted his head. "Can't you just fly?"

"Yeah, I can, but how are you gonna get up there?" I asked.

Olsen scratched his chin, thinking hard. Then his eyes lit up. "Wait. Use those Celestial Chains of yours."

"I'M NOT STRONG ENOUGH TO PICK YOU UP! Are you crazy?!" I shouted, exasperated.

"Look, fine. Just try it."

With a huff, I summoned the Celestial Chains. They shot out of my hands and wrapped around Olsen. He grunted, and I lifted him into the air. It was like picking up a pack of water bottles, not too heavy. I flew up, and as we neared the lock, I channeled celestial energy into my finger, touching the lock.

The energy crackled like electricity, and within seconds, the lock disengaged.

The door opened. I pulled Olsen up and flung him off the chains. He landed with a thud, groaning as he stood up, rubbing his back.

"You know, next time, don't use those chains. They *hurt*," Olsen grumbled.

I nodded, but before I could respond, we found ourselves in a long, blue hallway. Fancy lights lined the ceiling, casting a soft glow, but the hall seemed to stretch on forever. At the far end, I could see the glimmer of electrical lasers.

"This is gonna be a long one," I muttered, pulling out my daggers. We began walking slowly, trying to make as little noise as possible. Guards were the only ones awake at this hour, and they were probably watching for intruders.

Minutes felt like hours. Then hours felt like an eternity. Olsen and I passed the time by singing "I Want It That Way" by the Backstreet Boys to keep from losing our sanity.

D: "TELL ME WHY?!"

O: "AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT A HEARTACHE!"

D: "TELL ME WHY?!"

O: "AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT A MISTAKE!"

D: "TELL ME WHY?!"

O: "I NEVER WANNA HEAR YOU SAY!"

In perfect sync: *"WOO! I Want It That Way!"*

After what felt like years of singing the same song over and over again, we finally reached the lasers.

I smirked. "At least it passed the time."

Angel's voice crackled through the walkie-talkie again. "It's Prince and Demaurion's turn. Do you see the knights standing shoulder to shoulder on either side of the hallway?"

I looked around and saw the knights, standing still in their blue and black armor. Electricity pulsed through their suits, like veins of power, and some had blackened arms while others had only one.

"Yeah, I see them," I responded.

"Good. Demaurion will take care of any knights that wake up, and Prince will help you get through the lasers," Angel explained.

Suddenly, Prince shot through the hallway, his Lightning Bird form blazing with energy. He was faster than I expected. Demaurion appeared next, morphing into his sea serpent Leviathan form and zooming toward us.

He shifted back into his human form and caught his trident. "Let's get to work," he said, smirking.

Prince crackled with lightning. "OH YEAH! I'M GONNA BECOME TOM CRUISE!"

Prince dashed effortlessly through the labyrinth of lasers, his movements sharp and fluid. Without hesitation, he pressed the red button beside the gleaming blue titanium door, and it slid open with a slow hiss. As it did, the lasers vanished. Luckily, the guards hadn't heard a thing, so Demaurion refrained from launching an attack on them. We were fortunate, really, this spot seemed to be a network of ten caves, positioned at every conceivable angle and direction. The ceilings were covered in a deadly forest of jagged electrical spikes, each one crackling with lightning. If anything fell, it would be fried instantly.

The caves themselves were dark and damp, their interiors stretching into eerie blackness that seemed endless. The air was thick with moisture, the kind of dampness that made every surface feel cold and uncomfortable. But then, a voice crackled through the walkie-talkie. It was Power, steady as ever. "Don,

you should be in the room with the ten caves. Don't panic, the one you want is the lightest one."

I looked around, trying to find a source of light in the pitch black. "Which one's the lightest one?" I asked, feeling a bit lost.

"Go through the middle one, cave number 5," Power replied.

I turned to the cave directly in front of me, and sure enough, it glowed with a soft cyan hue, just enough to make it stand out in the otherwise bleak landscape. I nodded, signaling the others to follow. We moved quickly, entering the cave, though it didn't exactly get any brighter as we ventured deeper. The faint cyan glow cast eerie shadows on the black rocks, and the constant sound of water dripping from above echoed around us. It was the kind of place that could go on forever, but it was too damp and claustrophobic for my liking.

I could feel my patience wearing thin. "Time to put these wings to use," I muttered to myself, and with a deep breath, I spread my wings wide. They flickered with a few colors, and the others watched in confused silence. A moment later, my crystallized wings started to glow a bright purple, casting a radiant light across the cave. The gloom was chased away like the night at sunrise.

"Woah... How'd you do that?" Olsen asked, his voice full of awe.

I flashed him a grin. "Just a little Celestianite perk."

We continued forward, but the cave suddenly trembled beneath our feet.

"Did you guys feel that?" I asked, halting in my tracks. Olsen looked around, clearly hearing nothing.

"No, I don't hear any—"

The cave shook again, a deep rumble that cut him off.

"Okay, WE GOTTA GET OUTTA HERE!" Prince shouted, his

wings flapping rapidly as he soared ahead. Without another word, we all bolted toward the exit. But the cave had other plans. Rocks began to fall, crashing down from the ceiling in a cacophony of noise, and the ground shook with a force that threatened to swallow us whole.

"MOVE!" I yelled, charging up with celestial energy, my wings flapping furiously to keep pace with Prince. Olsen, now in his Rockslide Ankylosaurus form, and Demaurion, in his Dragonic Leviathan form, followed behind, but the cave was falling apart around us. The sound of crumbling stone filled the air, punctuated by the sharp cracks of jagged spikes breaking loose.

I darted between falling rocks and debris, my heart racing, but the cave was relentless. It was as if it wanted to trap us here. I ducked, dodging a falling spike just in time, but then the tremors escalated. The entire cave seemed to come alive, shaking violently as rocks and debris began to block the exit.

"DON! WATCH OUT!" Olsen shouted, his voice laced with panic.

I looked up just as a jagged, earth-shattering spike came hurtling down. It pierced through my shimmering wing with terrifying force, embedding deep into the crystalized structure. I gasped in pain as I was slammed to the ground, the weight of the spike pinning me down. Blood began to spill from the wound, staining the stone floor beneath me.

"DON!" Prince cried out, his wings flaring as he darted toward me, desperation in his eyes. He landed beside me, trying to lift the spike with his wings, but it was too heavy.

Suddenly, Olsen came charging from behind, his tail-club swinging down with ferocious force. The spike shattered into pieces, scattering across the cave floor. I gritted my teeth and

tried to push myself up, but the pain in my wing was unbearable. I couldn't fly, and moving in my dragon form was a struggle. The weight of the rocks falling around me felt like a hundred tons, and my limbs were too weak to carry me much further.

"I got you, bro!" Olsen shouted, his voice filled with determination.

More rocks rained down, blocking our path, but Olsen didn't hesitate. He transformed into his human form and wrapped an arm around me, helping me to my feet. I was limping, barely able to stay conscious as we pushed forward. My vision blurred with every step, the cave's collapse ringing in my ears.

"I don't think we can... make it," I murmured weakly, my voice barely audible.

"We're gonna make it!" Olsen reassured me, though his voice sounded strained as the rocks crashed down around us.

I stumbled, exhaustion weighing down on me with every step. I could hear muffled voices, but I couldn't make them out clearly. My body was slowing, my movements sluggish, and the next thing I knew, I was falling to the ground, unable to keep my eyes open.

I felt the rocks close in around me as everything went dark.

My eyes fluttered open slowly, voices muffled in the distance like echoes in water. I sat up, blinking a few times, trying to figure out where I was. It hit me—I was still in the Thunderstark Kingdom. Inside the cave. The one where we all crashed to rest.

I looked around.

There they were—Olsen, Prince, Demaurion, Archie, Ella, Angel... and Power.

My gaze dropped to my injured wing. A bandage was wrapped around the secondary mainsail of my dragon wing, still shim-

mering in that signature bright violet hue, with white flecks glinting like stars. At least that part of me hadn't dimmed.

Sunlight spilled in through the mouth of the cave. Morning. Which meant... everyone was awake.

I turned to Angel. "Did you guys get the Power Gem?"

Angel smirked like he just won a video game on hard mode. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a shiny, cyan, hexagonal gem, glowing with a faint aura and humming with energy like a choir of ghosts.

He handed it to me. I held it in my hand, watching the cyan light swirl inside like a mini galaxy.

I turned to the group, then locked eyes with Power. "What happened?"

"You got hit by something called *ozz*," Power said casually.

I squinted. "Ozz? Like... that thing we studied in Insane Middle School? The fusion of rocks and lightning? Venomous static electricity or whatever?"

Power nodded. "Yeah. That exact ozz. I forgot to warn you. It won't kill you, but it can knock you out or mess you up pretty bad."

I groaned, pushing myself upright as rubble slid from my shoulders.

"Okay. I'm standing. That's progress. But what in Avangard was that earthquake?"

Angel froze.

The color drained from his face.

His eyes lowered.

"It's the Thunderstark Dragon Turtle..." he said quietly.

A long pause.

"Liren."

I blinked.

"...Cool name."

Another pause.

"Terrifying delivery. Who's Liren?"

Angel snapped toward me.

"LIREN. THE. DRAGON. TURTLE."

His hands sliced through the air with every word.

"He lives beneath Thunderstark Castle. The legends say the castle moves every day because he's carrying the entire kingdom on his back."

Silence.

My stomach dropped.

"We've been on top of a living natural disaster this whole time?"

Before Angel could answer—

AAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!

Screams erupted across the kingdom.

KRRRRRRRAAAAAAAKKK!

The earth split apart.

Buildings shook.

Windows exploded outward.

Thunder detonated overhead like artillery fire.

Then the ground lurched again.

Harder.

Much harder.

We ran.

Fast.

I burst from the cave entrance and slid across the dirt, carving a trench behind me.

Then I looked up.

My brain immediately disconnected.

No thoughts.

No words.

Just fear.

Far beyond Thunderstark Kingdom—

Something was rising.

And rising.

And rising.

Entire mountains disappeared behind it.

Clouds split apart around it.

The horizon itself seemed too small.

Liren emerged from the storm.

Colossal didn't even begin to describe him.

The Leviathan stood at 1,625 feet.

Liren?

3,250 feet.

A walking continent.

A living titan.

Jet-black scales covered his body, each one larger than a house.

Rivers of yellow lightning surged through glowing cracks between the scales.

His shell resembled an entire mountain range fused together by storms.

Jagged crystal-like spikes erupted across its surface.

Blue energy pulsed beneath the shell like a massive reactor core.

Every pulse illuminated the clouds.

Every pulse shook the kingdom.

BOOOOOOOM.

BOOOOOOOM.

BOOOOOOOM.

Then I saw it.

My breath caught.

Liren slowly turned.

Then his eyes opened.

Pure electric blue.

Twin stars burning inside a monster.

His gaze locked onto us.

The temperature dropped.

The sky darkened.

Birds exploded from the forests in every direction.

Animals fled.

Even the clouds seemed to recoil.

Then Liren opened his mouth.

The roar that followed didn't sound natural.

RRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!

The shockwave flattened entire forests.

Trees snapped like twigs and were hurled through the air. Windows shattered for miles. Lightning erupted across Liren's shell, crackling in waves of blue, yellow, and white until his entire body looked like a living storm.

Energy gathered inside his mouth.

It grew brighter and brighter, swelling into a blinding sphere that illuminated the battlefield.

BRIGHTER.

BRIGHTER.

BRIGHTER.

BOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!

A pillar of lightning larger than a city erupted from his jaws and tore across the kingdom.

"GET DOWN!!"

Everyone dove.

The beam struck.

The world exploded.

A wall of force burst outward, ripping across the kingdom like a tsunami. The shockwave launched me into the air before I even realized what happened.

The ground vanished beneath me.

The sky spun.

The earth became a blur.

I crashed.

Rolled.

Bounced across the dirt.

Then rolled again.

When I finally stopped moving, a shadow swallowed me.

I looked up.

A claw larger than a skyscraper was descending from the heavens.

My eyes widened.

"No."

FWOOOOSH!

I vanished.

The claw smashed into the earth a split second later. The impact generated a crater hundreds of feet wide and sent debris flying in every direction.

I reappeared nearby in a crouch.

Dust swirled around me.

Liren stared down from above while lightning crawled across his face.

I pulled both daggers free.

Purple celestial energy exploded across their blades.

I grinned.

"Alright."

CRACK.

Energy surged beneath my feet.

I launched forward.

BOOM.

The ground exploded behind me.

I shot through the air and brought both daggers down.

SLASH!

The blades carved across his leg.

A glowing wound opened and golden blood sprayed outward like molten electricity.

Liren didn't even notice.

He didn't flinch.

He didn't react.

I may as well have poked a mountain with a toothpick.

I landed and skidded backward, digging trenches through the dirt.

Sweat rolled down my face.

"Let's get this over with."

I spun around.

"GUYS?!"

Silence.

"GUYS WHERE ARE YOU?!"

"WE'RE OVER HERE!!"

Angel's voice echoed from behind Liren.

My eyes widened.

The giant foot was already descending.

Straight toward them.

No time.

My pupils ignited with celestial light.

A grin spread across my face.

"Alright then."

I sprinted.

Blue-purple energy erupted behind me.

Liren's leg rose above me like a vertical cliff.

Didn't matter.

I ran straight up it.

Gravity could file a complaint later.

SLASH!

SLASH!

SLASH!

SLASH!

My daggers blurred.

Dozens of glowing cuts appeared across the titan's scales. Chunks of armor-like plating broke free and rained from the sky.

I leaped.

Celestial chains exploded from my wrists.

The glowing links wrapped around Liren's snout.

I yanked myself forward, swinging through the storm and flipping over his head.

Then his mouth opened.

Another beam was already charging.

I stared.

"Oh you've gotta be kidding me."

BOOOOOOOM!

Lightning erupted.

I twisted through the air.

The blast missed me by inches.

The sky became a sea of electricity. Clouds vaporized instantly as the shockwave spun me wildly through the air.

A second later, I crashed onto Liren's shell.

THUD.

The surface stretched endlessly beneath me.

It felt less like a shell and more like an entire mountain range. Jagged spikes towered in every direction, each one the size of a skyscraper.

For one brief second, everything was still.

Then Liren shook.

Like a dog shaking off water.

The entire world tilted.

"NO NO NO NO NO NO!"

I lost my footing instantly.

My body bounced across the shell, slamming into spikes and tumbling uncontrollably down the massive slope.

Then the edge arrived.

Suddenly there was no ground beneath me.

Only air.

I fell.

Fast.

Very fast.

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!"

Wind screamed past me.

My wings were damaged.

The ground rushed upward.

Closer.

Closer.

Closer.

I was dead.

Absolutely dead.

Then an idea hit me.

The Power Gem.

I ripped it from my pocket.

The cyan crystal glimmered in my hand.

"Come on."

Nothing.

"Come on!"

Nothing.

The earth rushed closer.

My heart pounded against my ribs.

"DO SOMETHING!!"

Still nothing.

"POWER GEM!! I NEED YOU RIGHT NOW!!"

For a split second, everything became silent.

No wind.

No thunder.

No heartbeat.

Nothing.

Then—

For a split second—

Everything became silent.

No wind.

No thunder.

No heartbeat.

Nothing.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!

A pillar of cyan energy detonated from my body.

Not upward.

Everywhere.

The beam ripped through the clouds, tore a hole through the storm itself, and shot beyond the atmosphere like it was trying to punch a hole through the universe.

Lightning exploded beneath my skin.

Every nerve ignited.

Every muscle screamed.

Every heartbeat became a nuclear detonation inside my chest.

"RRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!"

The ground beneath me vanished.

Not shattered.

Vanished.

Reduced to glowing particles by the force pouring out of my body.

Cyan lightning wrapped around my arms.

My legs.

My neck.

My eyes.

The energy wasn't surrounding me anymore.

It was becoming me.

The Power Gem had awakened.

And immediately—

Everything went wrong.

The world slowed.

Not metaphorically.

Actually slowed.

Raindrops froze.

Dust stopped moving.

Lightning crawled through the sky like frozen rivers.

Even Liren seemed trapped inside a painting.

I looked around.

Confused.

Terrified.

My own voice sounded distorted.

"...what?"

Then I moved.

Or at least—

I thought I moved.

FWIP.

I was suddenly three miles away.

My eyes widened.

The mountain beside me exploded from the shockwave.

"HUH?!"

FWIP.

I disappeared again.

This time I reappeared above the clouds.

FWIP.

Back near the kingdom.

FWIP.

Across the horizon.

FWIP.

Inside a thunderstorm.

FWIP.

Back in front of Liren.

I wasn't controlling the speed.

The speed was controlling me.

Panic immediately set in.

"OH COME ON!"

Liren roared.

The sound hadn't even finished leaving his mouth before I accidentally crossed the battlefield hundreds of times.

Cyan streaks erupted everywhere.

Thousands of them.

Millions.

The entire kingdom looked surrounded by an ocean of blue comets.

To everyone else—

I hadn't moved.

Not once.

I was flickering in and out of existence so quickly it looked like I was standing perfectly still.

Yet entire mountain ranges were exploding behind me.

Storm clouds were splitting apart.

The atmosphere was bending.

Reality itself looked confused.

Liren attacked.

A claw larger than a city descended toward me.

I tried stepping backward.

Instead—

FWOOOOOOOOOOM!!!

I vanished.

The claw struck nothing.

A continent-sized trench exploded across the landscape where I had accidentally crossed.

The titan turned.

I was already somewhere else.

Then somewhere else.

Then somewhere else again.

He couldn't follow me.

Neither could I.

The Power Gem screamed inside my veins.

More speed.

More speed.

MORE SPEED.

My vision fractured.

The world stretched.

Space folded.

Colors stopped looking normal.

The horizon curved.
For one horrifying moment—
I thought I was going to rip myself apart.
Then something clicked.
Not mastery.
Not control.
Just instinct.
Enough instinct.
I clenched my fist.
Cyan lightning erupted around my arm.
The storm above the kingdom stopped moving.
Every cloud froze.
Every bolt of lightning froze.
Every particle of dust froze.
Even Liren froze.
The entire world held its breath.
Then—
I moved.
FWOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!
A single cyan streak crossed the kingdom.
Crossed mountains.
Crossed oceans.
Crossed the horizon.
Crossed everything.
And my fist connected.
BOOM.
Nothing happened.
For one second.
Two.
Three.
Then reality caught up.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!

The atmosphere split apart.

Clouds vaporized across the continent.

The ocean surged against distant shores.

The earth buckled beneath the force.

A ring of cyan energy erupted from the impact and expanded across the horizon like a second sunrise.

Liren's head snapped sideways.

Lightning exploded from every crack in his body.

His shell shattered in dozens of places.

The titan staggered.

Actually staggered.

For the first time since emerging—

Fear entered his eyes.

Then the giant began to fall.

Slowly.

Painfully.

The impossible mountain of flesh and storm tilted sideways.

Forests disappeared beneath his shadow.

Mountains vanished behind him.

The kingdom watched in horror.

And awe.

Liren crashed through the first mountain.

Then the second.

Then the third.

Entire peaks shattered apart like glass sculptures.

His shell carved a canyon across the landscape.

Lightning erupted from his body in continent-spanning arcs.

Chunks of crystal shell the size of castles rained from the heavens.

The impact generated tsunamis of dust that rolled across the horizon.

BOOOOOOOOOOM!!!

BOOOOOOOOOOM!!!

BOOOOOOOOOOM!!!

Every collision felt like a natural disaster.

The world shook.

Thunderstark Kingdom shook.

The clouds shook.

Even the storm seemed terrified.

Finally—

After tearing apart half the horizon—

Liren hit the earth one last time.

KRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAASH!!!

The shockwave flattened forests.

Dust swallowed the sky.

Lightning flickered through the smoke.

Then—

Silence.

No roar.

No movement.

No storm.

Nothing.

The titan was down.

I hovered above the battlefield.

Barely.

The cyan lightning around me sputtered violently.

My body trembled.

The Power Gem flickered.

Then the energy vanished all at once.

I dropped.

THUD.

Face-first.

"...ow."

The gem slipped from my fingers and rolled across the dirt.

For several seconds—

I didn't move.

The storm above Thunderstark Kingdom had finally begun to die.

The black clouds unraveled.

The lightning faded.

The wind slowed.

And for the first time since Liren awakened—

The world felt quiet.

I pushed myself onto my elbows.

Pain shot through every part of my body. My muscles felt shredded. My bones felt like they had been cracked apart and glued back together wrong. Every breath burned.

Yet somehow, impossibly, I was still alive.

Far below, the kingdom erupted into celebration.

The sound rolled across the mountains like another storm. Thousands of voices echoed through the valley, bouncing off cliffs and shattered peaks. Even from this distance, I could hear them cheering.

I simply listened.

Then I rolled onto my back and stared at the sky.

The storm was finally breaking apart. Dark clouds drifted away, revealing streaks of sunlight pouring across the horizon. After everything that had happened, the sight almost didn't feel real.

A grin slowly spread across my face.

Three beasts down.

Only a few remained.

"...you look terrible."

I blinked and turned my head.

Angel stood nearby with his map tucked beneath one arm. Dirt covered his clothes, his glasses sat crooked on his face, and his hair looked like the storm had personally declared war on it. Somehow, despite looking just as exhausted as everyone else, he still managed to sound judgmental.

"You disappeared for almost ten minutes," he said. "Do you have any idea how concerning that is? I genuinely thought the Power Gem vaporized you."

I snorted.

"Thanks for believing in me."

"You're welcome."

The response came so quickly that I couldn't even be offended.

A series of heavy footsteps thundered across the battlefield.

THUD.

THUD.

THUD.

Olsen emerged through the settling dust, pieces of shattered stone armor still hanging from his shoulders. The second he spotted me lying there, his eyes widened.

"Don!"

Before I could react, he lunged forward and wrapped both arms around me.

Pain exploded through my spine.

"ACK! OLSEN!"

"I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU ACTUALLY WON!"

"I KNOW!"

"YOU PUNCHED A MOUNTAIN TURTLE!"

"I KNOW!"

"THAT'S THE COOLEST THING I'VE EVER SEEN!"

"I KNOW!"

He nearly crushed me into the ground again before finally letting go.

Nearby, a bolt of lightning flashed across the battlefield.

Prince landed beside us, electricity crackling around his body before slowly fading away. He stared out at the enormous corpse stretched across the horizon.

The titan's shell alone was bigger than entire villages.

Prince looked at it.

Then at me.

Then back at it.

His face twisted into disbelief.

"...nah."

I blinked.

"What do you mean, 'nah'?"

He pointed directly at Liren.

"There's absolutely no way you beat that thing."

"I literally did."

Prince narrowed his eyes.

He looked back at the titan.

Then at me.

Then back at the titan again.

"...nah."

A laugh escaped me despite the pain.

Archie walked out of the dust a few moments later.

The flames around his fists had long since vanished, but the expression on his face remained.

A low whistle escaped him as he surveyed the destruction.

The shattered mountains.

The trenches carved through the earth.

The remains of the storm.

The fallen titan.

Then he looked at me.

"Damn."

Coming from Archie, that might as well have been a standing ovation.

Demaurion arrived shortly after.

Water drifted lazily around his arms before dissolving into mist. His blue eyes swept across the battlefield, carefully taking in every scar left behind by the fight.

Finally, his gaze landed on me.

"You know," he said, folding his arms, "I leave you alone for five minutes and somehow you become a natural disaster."

I pointed weakly toward Liren.

"To be fair, he started it."

Demaurion looked at the titan.

Then at the mountains.

Then at the giant crater I was currently lying inside.

"...fair."

A swirl of sand spiraled nearby.

Ella stepped out of it and immediately froze.

Her eyes locked onto the titan.

Then onto me.

Then back onto the titan.

The silence stretched.

Which was terrifying.

Because Ella always had something to say.

"Ella?" I asked.

She slowly raised a finger and pointed toward Liren.

"You fought that?"

"Yep."

She stared at me for another second.

"You?"

"Yep."

"The same Don who nearly choked on a blueberry last year?"

I immediately sat up.

"THAT HAPPENED ONE TIME."

Ella buried her face in her hands.

"I can't believe you're a real person."

Before I could defend myself, a pulse of blue energy swept across the battlefield.

Everyone turned.

Power descended from the sky.

Calm.

Silent.

Completely untouched.

Not a scratch marked his clothes.

Not a speck of dirt rested on his shoulders.

He looked less like someone who had just witnessed an apocalyptic battle and more like someone who had finished a casual afternoon walk.

The group immediately fell quiet.

Power's glowing eyes drifted toward the fallen titan.

Then toward me.

Silence followed.

Five seconds passed.

Then ten.

Then fifteen.

Finally, he gave a single nod.

"...acceptable."

I stared at him.

"THAT'S IT?"

Power shrugged.

"It worked."

"I ALMOST DIED."

"Yet you didn't."

"I THINK I BROKE REALITY."

"Only temporarily."

I pointed at him in disbelief.

"ONLY TEMPORARILY?!"

Power completely ignored me.

Of course he did.

Laughter erupted around us.

Even Archie laughed.

Even Demaurion.

For the first time in what felt like forever, nobody was fighting.

Nobody was running.

Nobody was desperately trying to survive the next disaster.

We were just standing there together.

Exhausted.

Bruised.

Broken.

Victorious.

The setting sun cast golden light across the titan's shell. The last storm clouds drifted apart overhead, and for a brief moment the entire battlefield glowed beneath the evening sky.

It felt like the end of something.

But it wasn't.

Because beyond the horizon, another adventure was waiting.

Angel suddenly unfolded his map.

His eyes widened.

"Musicia."

The group immediately turned toward him.

Then toward the distant horizon.

I pushed myself to my feet.

Every muscle protested.

My legs nearly gave out.

I didn't care.

A grin spread across my face as I climbed onto the shell of the fallen titan. The final traces of cyan lightning drifted from my body, scattering into the wind like fading stars.

Ahead of us stretched an entirely new land.

A new journey.

A new chapter.

I looked toward the horizon and smiled.

"Then let's start the real adventure."

✧ #1.9 — Homicide ✧

The wind howled through the shattered windows of the castle, carrying a ghostly chill. Overbrawl stepped inside, head bowed, each footstep echoing like a funeral march on the cracked marble floor.

He raised his head slowly—his gaze locking with Dreadixz's. Eyes dull and exhausted, he stared into the soul of the dark king like a beast that had crawled back from war. His tattered scarf whipped in the wind, the frayed ends fluttering like battle flags.

"I'm back..." he muttered, voice hollow.

On his throne of obsidian and bones, Dreadixz gripped the armrests with clawed fingers and rose with calculated slowness. His eyes narrowed as he studied Overbrawl, who was bloodied, limping, and barely holding himself together, one arm hanging uselessly, nearly severed.

"Ah... finally," Dreadixz sneered, lacing his fingers behind his back. "My *'finest'* soldier returns... looking like a chewed-up carcass."

He descended the stairs of the throne platform with deliberate calm, his voice dripping with venom. Then, in a flash of lunar light, his body expanded and twisted, limbs stretching, scales spreading, horns jutting skyward, as he transformed into his Lunaranite Dragon form.

The roar that erupted from his throat shattered the eerie wind's whispers and echoed across the entire region of Foreshade like a war drum.

"And to think," he snarled, walking slowly toward Overbrawl, "you were so confident in killing the Chosen Ones."

He stopped just inches away, grabbed Overbrawl by the jaw, and yanked his face upward.

"Yet all I see... is *failure*."

His voice was quiet, but it rang with a dark, ancient malice. He released Overbrawl, letting the wounded warrior stumble back. Dreadixz slithered away, his jet-black tail sweeping ominously behind him.

"How *dare* you disrupt my plans—"

Knock knock.

A sudden bang echoed through the chamber. Dreadixz turned toward the massive iron portcullis at the front of the hall, a scowl spreading across his draconic features.

"...Enter."

The gates groaned open, smoke and shadows billowing in like a living storm. From the fog emerged a new figure, tall, slim, and wrapped in shifting black shadows. He looked eerily similar to Overbrawl, but twisted. His body was cloaked in a deep obsidian hue, with red eyes glowing like twin hells. Dark energy flared around him like crackling black fire.

Dreadixz's scorn morphed into something closer to satisfaction because of *him*.

"Well, well," he said in a smooth, deadly tone. "Took you long enough to show your face."

The figure clenched his fists. "I'm not here to serve. I'm here to pave my own path."

His voice was calm, confident, cold.

"I don't play nice with others, and I sure as hell don't sign alliances with strangers I barely remember. But you, Dreadixz... King or not, I'm here to challenge the narrative."

Dreadixz turned away, shifting back into his humanoid form with a flicker of lunar energy. He strolled back to his throne and reclined with the air of a warlord savoring a storm.

"Incarceration..." he said with a wicked smile. "The traitor of the Zeniths. The power-hungry fool who abandoned the Heavenly Spot of Celestia after a '*minor disagreement*'... Tell me, where's your little *pet*?"

The pet he referred to was no ordinary beast, it was a nightmare forged in darkness, a creature made to devour hope and burn legends to ash.

Incarceration's smile was slow and dangerous. Black fire danced along his knuckles as he crossed two fingers and touched them to his forehead.

"Homicide," he whispered.

His eyes snapped open, flashing crimson.

Dark magic exploded from his arms, spiraling into the air in tendrils of screaming shadow. The energy twisted, coiled, and then, formed. A massive shape emerged: a nine-headed Hydra, black-scaled and scarred with white gashes, eyes glowing a menacing violet. Each of its heads swayed like cobras preparing to strike. Its claws gleamed obsidian-sharp, and a jagged purple sail ran from its spines down its monstrous tail.

Dreadixz chuckled, watching the beast take shape with gleeful approval.

"Ah yes... I nearly forgot you wield the Nightmare Element. Able to summon any creature—real or imagined. Even ones that *shouldn't* exist."

His grin widened.

"I'm impressed."

He stood, eyes flickering with deadly intent. "Now go. *Find the Chosen Ones*. I want their bodies at my feet. And one of their heads, *gone*."

The Hydra let out a thunderous roar that shook the walls. Incarceration turned to it, his voice low, dark, and loyal.

"Yes... master."

Meanwhile...

The skies of Avangard were clear and blue, stretching endlessly above us like an infinite canvas. I was in my dragon form, soaring through the clouds with my wings wide open, basking in the freedom of flight.

Puffy white clouds drifted around us, and birds chirped in the breeze as they flew by. A few Griffins joined us for a bit, then peeled off toward their homes in the mountains.

I twirled mid-air and dove through the fluffiest cloud I could find, feeling it burst around me like cotton candy. The others were flying with me too, Ella, Angel, and Olsen were riding on my back.

Prince zipped beside us in his Lightning Bird form, flapping his wings with little thunder booms and streaks of electricity trailing behind him like party lights. Archie flew through the clouds in his blazing Phoenix form, burning holes through the mist like a tiny meteor on fire. Demaurion, in his Leviathan form, glided through the sky with serious sea serpent energy.

Where were we headed? Across Thunderstark, past Naria and the Sand Dunes—we were making our way to Musicia, a place

we'd *never* been to before.

"I heard it's just one giant non-stop party!" Prince shouted, his voice crackling with static as he bolted ahead.

"Eh, I doubt it," Olsen replied. "However I know there's tons of music there, the name kinda gives it away."

I glanced down and nearly choked. We were *high*. Like, "see the curvature of the planet" high. Below us were entire oceans, waves crashing into each other with blue chaos. I could even spot the Land of Hearts from way up here.

The wind was warm against my scales, and the air smelled like pure freedom. Then Prince lightning-dashed above me.

"We're close!" he said, beak pointing downward. "Musicia's right there!"

I followed his gaze and caught a shimmer of lights in the distance.

"You're right! I can see it!" Ella shouted with a grin.

Olsen gave me a playful punch on the back. "Well then, that's our stop. Ready to become a Hero?"

I smiled wide. "Why the hell not?!"

We dove through the foggy clouds like shooting stars and landed gracefully on the glowing streets of Musicia. Olsen and Ella hopped off my back, and I slowly shifted back into my regular form. Everyone else followed suit, transforming back one by one.

The sight before us was *insane*. The city shimmered under the sun's rays in glowing yellows and sparkling pinks. Towering buildings of gold and rose quartz twisted upward in chaotic harmony. Glitter literally erupted from rooftops, drifting lazily through the air. It was like stepping into a living music video.

Crowds of people filled the sidewalks, weaving through the pulsing city. Music echoed from all directions, and the air

buzzed with excitement.

"THIS IS INSANE!" Prince shouted, wide-eyed with joy.

"I know right? They've got music playing from *everywhere*! But, it looks like someone with epilepsy could probably die here," I said, grabbing his wing as he almost took off running through the neon-lit streets.

The sun hovered above us while the sky shifted to soft orange. Cars zoomed by with slick style, and honestly? This place had *everything*.

Olsen looked like he was about to ascend to a higher plane.

"So... beautiful," he said.

Ella smiled as the breeze caught her hair. "It's like nothing in this place could ever go wrong."

We wandered deeper into the city, until my ears twitched. Hard. Like "danger radar" twitch.

Angel paused and looked at me. "Don? Your ears are doing the weird twitch thing again. Should I be worried? Do you need, a—Celestianite doctor?"

"No, I'm good," I said, eyes scanning the sky. "It's just what happens when I hear something coming... or *someone* flying at full speed ri—OOF!"

I got *tackled*. Hard. Whatever hit me felt like a tiger with revenge in its heart. I hit the ground with a thud.

"Get up, I didn't hit you that hard," a sassy, familiar voice said.

I teleported a few feet away, making whoever-it-was face-plant into the street. I turned to look—and yep, I knew that voice. Sophia.

She looked up from the ground with a frown. "How ya doin'?"

I rolled my eyes, "Hey, tiger. Just casually tackling me out of the sky again?"

She had transformed into her tiger form—a yellow tiger with pink stripes. But she quickly shifted back into her base form, tail swishing. She wore a pink jacket with a white crop-top under, light mixed skin, her hair's yellow and curly too!

"Forgot that were all about cosmic, shit, my bad," she grinned,

I smirked. "Anyone else part of your surprise attack?"

That's when Javier popped out from behind a building, sighing like this was just another Tuesday. He strolled toward us, hands in his pockets. Dark blue skin, a blue coat too big for his size, blue jeans, he had straight black hair and a blue logo of a cube on his forehead. Hundreds of hedgehog quills jutted from his back, poking through the coat from behind. The most innocent being in all of Avangard, and I trust him with my *life*.

Sophia crossed her arms as she looked at the rest of the crew. "Long time no see! We came for the festival."

"What festival?" Ella asked.

"The Musicia Festival!" Sophia beamed. "You don't know? It's the biggest celebration for all Soundanites. Music, lights, performances, it's a whole vibe. And it starts in a few hours!"

We all exchanged looks. Glances. Smirks. The classic "are we doing this?" face.

I turned back to her. "We're in," I said, shaking her hand.

"WOOP! WOOP! PARTY TIME!" Prince roared.

But Sophia suddenly gagged and covered her nose. "Okay, but y'all gotta change. How long have you been wearing those outfits?"

"Hmm," I said, counting on my fingers. "One... two... maybe eleven days?"

"ELEVEN?!" she screeched. "Boy, you need to *touch* soap and fabric softener immediately. Lucky for you, I know someone

who has gear."

Power raised an eyebrow. "Where?"

She grinned and pointed ahead. "Follow me."

We followed her through the chaotic hum of the city until we reached a house that was both small *and* somehow huge. It was bubblegum pink with warm yellow light glowing from inside, straight out of a fantasy catalog from Iris Town. She opened the door and waved us in.

Finally, we reached her house, a cozy building tucked along a quiet street, though still gleaming in the golden-pink light of the city. The walls were polished yellow with pink accents along the shutters and eaves, and flowering vines curled up toward the roof. A small fountain out front played a gentle melody as water arced gracefully into a stone basin. Harmony Birds perched on the roof, chirping soft welcoming tunes.

"This is it," Sophia said with a smile, gesturing toward the door.

She opened the door and waved us in.

And inside? Absolute madness, in the best way.

Four different couches were chillin' on the right side of the living room, surrounding a red-and-white patterned carpet. The lighting was soft yellow, and the walls were painted white with brown wooden paneling going halfway up like they were wearing fancy belts. A TV sat on a stone-white stand in front of the couches, surrounded by vases of flowers that made the whole setup feel oddly elegant.

To the left was a wooden door in the distance, and right beside it, spiraling stairs leading upward like something magical was waiting at the top. We all plopped down on the couches, and that's when Sophia dropped the bomb.

"Who's ready to become a Hero?"

"HERO SUITS?! OH PARTY TIME!!!" Prince practically screamed, high pitched while bouncing like a kid in a candy store. My eyes sparked with Celestial energy as I looked at the bag. "Heroes... it's suiting time."

And just like that, the trial began.

We took turns showering upstairs, though let's be real, Demaurion hogged the bathroom like it was a throne room. I'm not joking, it was *so* annoying. Prince accidentally zapped the lights off with his electricity, and poor Javier had to get them back on like some unpaid maintenance man.

After I was done, I made sure to lather up with "*Scale Smoother~*"—the lotion that makes your dragon scales look fierce, sleek, and extra shiny. Gotta keep the aesthetic on point.

Then I hit the training room near the bathroom. Worked up a sweat, powered up my celestial skills, and even learned a fresh new move: **Insane Celestial Flick**. It's where I flick my fingers charged with Celestial energy and cause a shockwave strong enough to obliterate *literally* anything. I was also getting better at bouncing off walls like a pinball at a rave. This new speed boost? Oh yeah, my final move's gonna hit like a whole meteor strike now.

Once we were all cleaned up and powered up—it was time.

HERO. SUIT. TIME.

Cue the music. Cue the montage.

Olsen stepped out first: rocking an earthy green metallic suit with rugged brown shoulder pads. His helmet looked like a thick green-and-black beak, and his gloves? Straight-up stone. He wore black leather pants, green-and-black boots, and a green baldric that carried his signature Hammer of Earth.

Prince's suit was electric (literally). Blue with lightning-yellow streaks zipping across the fabric. Yellow pants. Slim-fit blue hoodie. Black gloves. And some wild blue cybernetic shoes that let him bolt at top speed. His back had a sleek electric sail running along his spine.

Demaurion's suit was cyber-oceanic. Blue with shark vibes. He wore blue gauntlets, darker gloves, and Aqua Jets, massive knee-high boots with fins and leg-thrusters for wild speed in water *and* air. He also had a water helmet, so yeah, he was ready to go full Leviatham.

Archie looked like a full-on mech phoenix. Red cyber-suit with orange flame streaks on the chest. Metallic wings flared on his back, red mixed with orange like fire dancing in motion. His helmet? A flaming phoenix head with black and yellow accents. His eyes glowed with unhinged fury. His legs were encased in gray metallic armor, and his jet-boots looked like they were ready to explode on command. His gloves were such a dark red they almost didn't look red anymore.

Ella wore a sandy-brown jumpsuit with a visor dusted from the dunes. Tight black pants, rounded brown gauntlets, and dune-colored boots with claws that could pierce steel. She looked fierce.

Angel's suit was full-on vortex-blue, a high-tech mech look with a purple glowing hexagon in the middle of his chest.

Sophia kept it simple but iconic, jacket, headphones, and a pink cannon shaped like a boombox locked onto her right arm like a

DJ ready for war.

And then—me.

I stepped out in a full-body purple jumpsuit with a bold black X slashing across the chest. Gold rings shimmered around my wrists, paired with white gloves traced with green patterns. My purple hiking shoes matched my mask, which was styled to look like a dragon's head, yeah, no joke. I had a yellow metallic belt strapped around my waist, black pants with yellow knee-pads, and a long black scarf whipping behind me like I was already flying into battle.

After the glam-up, we all crashed back onto the couches, feeling like the baddest crew in town. Sophia was casually brushing her hair with a pink brush, completely unfazed.

"So," I asked, turning to her, "when are we heading out? And where's this festival even happening?"

Sophia didn't even blink. "Still got a few hours. You idiots can just chill for now."

"Thanks," I muttered, rolling my eyes as I stared at the TV. Nothing was even on. Just a blank screen and a mind full of too much.

Because when you're chosen for a prophecy *this* huge, you start thinking. *Can I really pull this off?*

I looked out the window.

The sky was bleeding colors, shades of blue, orange, and gold, like the sunset itself was painting the end of the day by hand. Birds flew across the horizon. Cars beeped. People talked. Golden skyscrapers sparkled with pink glitter floating through the air like stardust. And those last sunbeams hit my face through the window.

I turned back to the TV, lost in thought.

Is this prophecy really that important?

I want to be a warrior, yeah... but that feeling's starting to blur.

Maybe there's something deeper here.

Something I'm missing.

"Hey Don, you alright? You look like you've been staring into space!" Sophia said.

"I'm okay," I replied. "Just thinking. I wanna become a Hero to prove something, but I know there's a deeper message, I'm just not seeing it."

Sophia sighed and set down her brush.

"Look, I wanna become a Hero too! For fame, because I wanna be famous! I wanted to be like my idol, Power."

"POWER IS YOUR IDOL?!" I hollered.

Sophia laughed.

"Why wouldn't he be?! I got like, a million pictures of this guy in my room. Don't tell anyone though."

She leaned in a bit, suddenly serious.

"Don, maybe the message is—'be *like* a Hero'. You know, save everyone, protect them from danger, all the easy usual stuff about being a Hero."

I turned away, thinking about her words. Maybe she was right. I *could* save people. I *could* protect them. I *could* stop evil.

Maybe... I was already a Hero.

I stayed on the couch for a few hours, then eventually drifted off to sleep. When I finally woke up, everyone was standing right in front of me.

"What the, we're already going?" I asked, groggy and surprised.

Olsen smirked. "Don didn't hear the timer."

"I-I-I DID—OLSEN..."

"'I did' is not an accurate definitive phrase after what you've just shown."

"THINGS CAN BE DEFINITIVE AND NOT DEFINI—OKAY! OKAY I'M COMING! I'M GETTING UP SEE! *IIIII'M* COMING!"

I jumped up from the couch and we bolted outside.

We slammed through the doors and the night city hit us like a visual bass drop. Neon rivers flowed up the sides of skyscrapers, hover-ads flickered midair, and the stars above looked fake—like someone cranked the saturation to max. The moon straight-up spotlighted us like, *yeah, you're the main characters, deal with it.*

We threaded through traffic, cars humming, bikes sparking, vendors yelling, until we stopped dead in front of it.

A giant pink casino, stacked with holographic cards, spinning dice the size of billboards, and blinking lights that pulsed in rhythm with the music leaking out. It didn't look like a building. It looked like a neon castle that ate a music festival and won.

"Okay so THIS is where we're going?!" Prince yelled, already vibrating.

"You're gonna love it," Sophia said, eyes glowing like she'd planned this for weeks.

"PARTY TIME!!!!" Prince screamed, voice cracking into dolphin mode.

We shoved through the glossy pink doors and—

BOOM.

Not a party.

A FULL-BLOWN FESTIVAL.

Confetti cannons blasted gold streamers from the ceiling. A live band on the main stage mixed trumpets, drums, electric guitars, and synths so loud the floor shook. Lights exploded in pink, blue, red, and white like fireworks trapped indoors. The

air smelled like sugar, sparks, and bad decisions.

Then it happened.

Someone screamed.

"WAIT—IS THAT—"

"NO WAY."

"POWER?!"

Every screen in the casino glitched for half a second as Power stepped in.

The #1 Hero.

The room detonated.

Music stopped mid-note. Chips flew. Drinks spilled. Someone fainted. Someone else climbed a slot machine screaming his name. A chant erupted from nowhere:

"POW-ER! POW-ER! POW-ER!"

Spotlights snapped onto him like he'd been summoned. Fireworks blasted indoors (somehow legal). The casino staff panicked and immediately leaned into it, festival banners dropped, DJs remixed his theme on the spot, and free tokens rained from the ceiling.

Power froze.

And then the fans SWARMED.

Girls. Fans. Merch shovers. Autograph seekers. Selfie stampede. Someone tried to crown him with glow sticks. Another person hugged his leg and refused to let go.

"I CAN'T BREATHE," Power said calmly, while absolutely drowning.

Olsen, immediately abandoned, whispered, "Bro... he's cooked."

Power tried to move. Failed.

He tried to wave. Bigger mistake.

Someone yelled, "MARRY ME," and the crowd lost its mind

all over again.

"ABORT ABORT ABORT," Power muttered, scanning for exits like a hunted legend.

Meanwhile—

Demaurion clenched his fists.

"This place is huge... I hate it."

Around us were specific insanity zones:

The Fireball Game: floating targets over lava holograms, Archie instantly lit his hands on fire.**The**

Knockout Arena: padded ring, flashing countdowns, energy gloves, Olsen *was supposed* to go there with Power. Rip.

The High-Roll Speedway: a sleek black supercar spinning slowly on a platform while people bet credits on simulated races.

The Aquarium Lounge: a massive glass tank where a shark and an eel circled like celebrity guests. Demaurion stared. "I'll hang with the fish."

People were also just... throwing juice in the air? On purpose? For vibes?

Ella vanished toward the **Ball of Yarn Spot**, which was exactly as cursed as it sounded.

I stood next to Sophia, completely overwhelmed.

"Got any suggestions? These games kinda look buns," I muttered.

She pointed at the stage.

"Sing."

My soul left my body.

"WOAH WOAH WOAH—SINGING ON STAGE?! I've got stage fright!"

She smirked.

"You're trying to be a Hero. Do it because I said so. Don't care."

I backed up fast.

"No no no no, remember LAST TIME?"

"Yeah," she smiled. "At least you didn't slip on a banana peel."

My face went blank.

"I slipped on a banana peel... and landed on a seventeen-year-old's chest."

Silence.

Somewhere in the distance, the Power chant got louder as he vaulted over a slot machine trying to escape.

Crickets yapped.

"You'll be fine, just get on stage!" Sophia said, way too confidently.

I stared at her.

She stared back.

...

...

...

I slowly turned my head to the right and spotted the backstage door glowing near the Fireball Game like a *quest marker I did NOT want to activate*.

I hesitated.

Heartbeat.

Another heartbeat.

Somebody spilled juice behind me for no reason.

But... she was right.

If I wanted to be a Hero of Avangard, I had to face my fears.

I gulped.

Loudly.

Like, cartoon loud.

Then I started walking.

I pushed through the crowd—"Sorry, sorry, my bad, excuse me, why are you wet?"—when suddenly—

"**DANCE! I WANT TO SEE YOU DANCE!**"

I froze.

Silence.

I turned around slowly like a horror movie protagonist who already knows they're cooked.

It was an old man. Beanie. Scarf. Worn-out black jacket. And a brown bird just... existing on his shoulder. Menacingly. Judging me.

I opened my mouth to say literally anything—

He interrupted me by pulling out a Valorent gun.

Pause.

...

...

...

"DANCE OR DIE!" he screamed.

The bird nodded.

"I'VE NEVER SEEN SOMEONE FROM THE PROPHECY DANCE IN MY LIFE! I GET MY ENTERTAINMENT OR YOU GET YOUR LIFE TAKEN!"

Another pause.

...

...

...

Okay.

First of all, sir???

Second, this feels illegal???

Third, why is no one reacting???

I'm like 99% sure he was drunk, because threatening a prophecy kid at a casino festival is *wild behavior*, but I was not

in the mood to become a tragic backstory.

"So—uh—"

I swallowed.

Again.

Still loud.

"You want me to... d-dance, right? I can... uh... show you one?"

Silence.

The bird blinked.

I did two awkward sidesteps. To the beat. Kinda.

I pushed myself back.

Repeated it.

He stared.

Unblinking.

Judging.

I sighed. Deep. Defeated.

"Ugh. Fine. You asked for this."

I busted out the slick-back toward the door. Full commitment. Shoulders rolling. Zero dignity.

The old man LOST IT.

"THAT'S WHAT I LIKE TO SEE!" he yelled, still waving the gun like it was a glow stick.

The bird flapped. Approval granted.

I slick-backed faster.

Harder.

Desperately.

I reached the backstage door, yanked it open, dove inside, and slammed it shut behind me like the FBI was after me.

Silence.

Inside, a single yellow light shined down.

A narrow staircase spiraled upward.

I stood there.

Breathing.

...

...

...

Then I climbed the stairs, opened the door at the top—

—and boom.

Backstage.

Alive.

Somehow.

The black curtains were just in front of me, and a microphone stand sat under a spotlight. I grabbed the mic, keeping it off to avoid making a scene.

That was when the door slammed open behind me, and the other four stormed in, with Sophia.

"Oh, you're doing it too?" Archie asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Yup," I mumbled, staring at the mic.

Olsen stepped in.

"It simply can't be that hard."

Prince opened his mouth, "Olsen, don't hit that high-note again."

"I don't have stage fright," Demaurion said, tiny drops of water dripping onto the floor, "I just don't feel like going on stage."

Archie whispered, "Cap."

Demaurion almost threw a water blast at him.

Sophia clapped her hands together.

"Alright guys, now get out there and show them who you are!"

She PUSHED us. Literally pushed ALL of us.

ON. STAGE.

In front of EVERY SINGLE INDIVIDUAL IN THE CASINO.

I stood there, hands shaking, praying no one would notice

us. And for a second... no one did. Until someone RUINED THAT. "Alright uh, are the next people the Chosen Ones?" the announcer shouted through the mic. Every head in the building turned to us. Silence dropped like a nuke. The music stopped. The room froze.

My eyes twitched. I started to sweat. My hands were clammy. The only sound was crickets. My heart thumped like a drumline. What do I say? What do I do? Think, Don, THINK! What could I possibly sing right now?

After a few seconds of straight panic, I had it.

The announcer leaned in, smiling.

"Alright Don, get us started with 'I want it that way' by the Backstreet Boys!"

"Out of all the songs-"

"SING IT."

I cleared my throat like I was about to drop the greatest vocal moment of the century. "*You are... my fire...*"

I shot Olsen a look. The boy didn't need a second cue. He opened his mouth like destiny itself summoned him.

"*The one... desire...*" The announcer whipped his head around. "Prince!!"

"*Believe when I saaay...*"

The announcer threw his hands in the air like he was conducting the dang universe. "Come on, Demaurion!!"

"*I want it THAT WAYYYYY—*"

The announcer, now screaming like his life depended on it: "*TELL ME WHY?!*"

"Ain't nothin' but a heartaaaache!"

"TELL ME WHY?!"

"Ain't nothin' but a mistaaaake!"

"TELL ME WHY!"

Archie: "*I never wanna hear you saaay—"*

Announcer, FINALE MODE: "COME ONNNNN!"

EVERYONE IN HARMONIZED PERFECTION: *"I WANT IT THAT WAAAAAY!"*

...Silence.

Like dead, funeral, pin-drop silence.

We stood there, thinking we just ruined everything.

CLAP. CLAP. CLAP.

The crowd straight up ERUPTED.

Screaming. Cheers. People were throwing roses. Someone cried. Someone fainted. WE DID IT. WE LEGIT DID IT. I was already feeling like a pop star when a mic came flying out of nowhere. I caught it like a boss, dropped the other one like I was in a concert, and some dude yelled:

"SING US ANOTHER SONG!"

I exhaled like an overworked celebrity. "Oh boy..."

I was *this* close to belting out *Bye Bye Bye* like my life was a 2000s boyband comeback tour when—

BANG.

I stopped mid-thought. Something slammed onto the roof. Hard.

"Probably nothing," I told myself. Famous last words.

Then it hit again.

BOOM. Louder. Heavier. Closer.

The crowd felt it this time, heads snapping up, whispers spreading like static in the air.

CRASH.

The casino doors BLEW OPEN, ripped clean off their hinges like a meteor had beef with gambling addiction. Screams erupted. Chairs flipped. Drinks went airborne.

And from the smoke and shadow stepped pure, prehistoric nightmare fuel.

The Hydra.

Nine heads. Dripping. Snarling. Each one snapping like it hadn't eaten in centuries and had just found the buffet. Thunder howled overhead. Rain dumped from the sky like it was rage-quitting reality. Lightning strobed across the beast, freezing it in brutal flashes.

Everything stopped.

Then, panic.

People bolted in every direction.

Some screamed.

Some tripped over chairs.

Some dove beneath poker tables as if cheap wood and felt were somehow going to save them from a nine-headed apocalypse.

The entire neon-lit casino dissolved into chaos.

One of the Hydra's heads slowly reared back.

Its throat glowed.

Brighter.

Brighter.

BRIGHTER.

FWOOOOOOOM!!

A beam of fire ripped across the room and erased half the

casino in a single sweep, tearing through slot machines, gaming tables, and entire sections of the building as explosions detonated one after another and molten debris rained through the air.

The floor cracked.

The ceiling buckled.

Neon signs burst into showers of colorful sparks.

Musicia's flashing lights reflected across the monster's scales while smoke swallowed everything.

The Hydra went completely feral.

Nine heads lashed in different directions at once, smashing pillars apart, ripping through walls, and turning the casino into a collapsing death trap.

Every head stopped moving.

Nine sets of glowing eyes slowly turned.

Locked onto me.

The room suddenly felt a whole lot smaller.

"...Yeah."

I rolled my shoulders.

"Game time."

Purple energy exploded from my body.

KRAAAAAAASH!!

Lightning-like celestial energy erupted through the casino as scales spread across my skin, wings burst from my back, and my Celestianite Dragon Form roared to life.

The surviving windows shattered from the pressure alone.

I sprinted.

The floor exploded beneath every step.

The Hydra lunged.

I launched myself straight at it.

For a split second we crossed paths in midair like two missiles

on a collision course.

Then everything detonated into motion.

I landed on its back.

The beast immediately went berserk.

It slammed through pillars.

Crashed through walls.

Skidded across the casino floor while all nine heads twisted wildly trying to throw me off.

The entire building shook like it had been caught inside an earthquake.

I dug my claws into its scales and sprinted across its back, weaving between snapping jaws as I carved glowing purple slashes across its hide.

One head whipped around.

Too slow.

I vaulted over it.

Another lunged from above.

I ducked underneath.

A third came from the side.

I drove my elbow into its jaw hard enough to snap its neck backward.

The Hydra shrieked.

Every head screamed at once.

The sound rattled the entire city block.

"THAT GOT YOUR ATTENTION?!"

I shouted.

"GOOD!"

One of the heads suddenly twisted behind me.

Its jaws snapped shut around my tail.

"...Uh oh."

WHAAAAAAAAAM!!

The monster swung me through the air like a toy.

The entire world became a blur of neon lights and broken concrete.

CRAAAAAASH!!

I blasted through the casino stage.

Speakers exploded.

Light rigs collapsed.

Pyrotechnics accidentally ignited.

Fireworks launched into the air and detonated throughout the casino while chunks of ceiling rained down around us.

For a moment the battlefield looked less like a monster attack and more like the world's most violent concert.

I pushed myself out of the wreckage.

Smoke drifted around me.

Purple energy crackled across my scales.

My neck popped.

The Hydra stared from the other side of the ruined casino.

Nine heads.

Nine snarling mouths.

Nine sets of glowing eyes.

I stared right back.

A grin slowly spread across my face.

"Round two."

I launched forward, roaring with the force of a collapsing galaxy.

The Hydra roared back.

BOOM.

We collided head-on like freight trains. The impact cracked the casino floor as I tackled that thing across the room. One of its heads immediately snapped down, hooked my horn, and SLAMMED me through three poker tables.

I flipped back to my feet, blood dripping from my jaw.

Still furious.

I charged again.

I leaped, CHOMPED onto one of its throats, and tried dragging the beast down. It thrashed violently, but before it could shake me loose, I slashed one of its eyes.

Direct hit.

The head screeched.

Then the Hydra whipped me around and launched me straight into a wall of slot machines.

Coins exploded everywhere like metallic confetti.

I sprinted through the rain of coins, celestial energy crackling around me, and swung my tail like a baseball bat.

CRACK.

One of its heads flew sideways and smashed through a roulette table.

And we weren't even CLOSE to done yet.

The Hydra crashed through the casino wall like a meteor.

I followed.

My jaws stretched wider than ever as I launched myself through the opening. Mid-air, I latched onto one of its necks, and both of us slammed into the ground outside, rolling through the thunder-charged darkness.

I sprang up first.

The Hydra lunged.

I jerked backward, barely avoiding its jaws, then raked my claws across its face, one, two.

A torrent of fire erupted from another head.

I dodged sideways, sprinted, jumped, and landed squarely on its back. My teeth sank deep into its scales while my tail lashed behind me as the monster bucked wildly.

I dropped off before it could crush me and circled with calculated fury.

Then I went for the leg.

CHOMP.

The Hydra roared and backhanded me across the street.

I crashed through a building, smashing walls and light fixtures.

Before I could recover, jaws clamped around my neck.

The world blurred.

The Hydra shot into the sky.

We blasted through rooftops until clouds swallowed us whole.

Then it let go.

I plummeted.

Fast.

But nah.

I wasn't done.

Celestial energy exploded from my wings.

I rocketed upward, blitzed past the Hydra, and raked my teeth across its flesh. Spinning mid-air, I came around again.

My claws slashed.

My tail followed.

SNAP.

One neck bent at an ugly angle.

Thunder BOOMED.

Lightning split the sky in half.

Blood sprayed from both of us as we tore into each other above the city, claws flashing between bursts of lightning.

I tail-whacked the beast so hard it spiraled toward the ground like a broken plane.

I dove after it.

Caught one neck.

Bit down.

Hard.

Trying to finish it.

The monster refused to die.

It flailed, throwing me away.

I twisted through the air, celestial energy spiraling around me like a vortex, then slammed into the earth.

BOOOOOOM.

The shockwave blasted the Hydra backward.

It retaliated instantly.

The beast crashed into me and dragged me through the wreckage. Claws ripped across my chest. Jaws seized my neck.

SPLAT.

It hammered me into the ground.

Pain exploded through my body.

I staggered upright.

The Hydra's tail smashed across my face so hard my neck popped.

Still, I lunged.

My jaws clamped onto one neck.

Another head bit back.

For a moment, we were literally locked in the dumbest, most brutal chompfest imaginable.

Then it flung me away.

Mid-flight, one of its skulls smashed into mine.

Blood sprayed.

I flew straight through the wall of a museum.

Glass shattered.

Ancient relics exploded around me.

Fossilized giants towered overhead.

The Hydra burst through after me.

Its eyes glowed purple.

A beam of fire erupted toward my face.

I dove right.

Hit all fours.

Sprint.

Leap.

CHOMP.

I landed directly on its head.

The Hydra roared and slammed me into a T. Rex skeleton.

Bones detonated everywhere.

Before I could recover, another head snatched me from the air and body-slammed me into a wall.

Dust exploded outward.

I jumped back onto its spine and sprinted across its back.

Then I bit down again.

The beast thrashed through the museum like a maniac, smashing fossils left and right until I slashed another eye.

The Hydra bucked violently.

I went flying.

CRASH.

Straight into a triceratops skeleton.

Pain shot through every bone in my body.

I growled.

Charged.

And slammed into its side.

The monster staggered—

Then grabbed my tail.

Uh oh.

The Hydra spun me around like a ragdoll and YEETED me across the museum.

Glass exploded as I skidded to a stop.

Slowly, I stood.

Bruised.

Bleeding.

Absolutely furious.

The Hydra stalked toward me, equally wrecked. Bones, glass, and shattered fossils were embedded all through its scales.

I roared.

It roared back.

Then we CLASHED.

Purple blasts erupted from its mouths.

I juked left.

Right.

Left again.

The attacks barely missed.

I launched straight at its face.

Mid-air, I spun and tail-whacked it across the skull.

The impact sent the monster crashing through a display of ancient armor.

A head snapped forward and grabbed my neck.

It slammed me through another glass wall.

I rebounded instantly.

Claws flashed.

Sparks flew.

Thunder shook the heavens.

I opened my jaws.

A celestial fire beam erupted point-blank.

BOOM.

The explosion launched the Hydra through the back of the museum, tearing through layers of history and wreckage.

I charged after it.

Beam after beam blasted from my mouth.

The entire museum lit up like daylight.

Walls shook.

Relics toppled.

The Hydra stumbled through the chaos, caught between collapsing displays and relentless celestial blasts.

I curled into a sphere.

Energy crackled around me.

Faster.

Faster.

FASTER.

LAUNCH.

I became a celestial comet.

Mid-air, I burst from the sphere, screamed at the top of my lungs, and unleashed one final beam.

The blast consumed the chamber in radiant light.

Silence followed.

The Hydra rose slowly from the wreckage.

Blood poured from countless wounds.

Bones protruded from its scales.

Glass glittered across its hide.

It was dying.

But still standing.

We locked eyes.

Outta nowhere, Ella, in her Desert Cat form (way bigger than expected btw), pounced from above, tearing into his back with claws and fangs. "I GOT IT!" she shouted, feral.

Olsen dropped in next in full Rockslide Ankylosaurus mode, chomping down on the Hydra's neck and *slamming* him to the floor.

Sophia, in her Musical Tiger form, joined Ella, double-teaming with a barrage of slashes and roars.

Prince zapped the monster mid-air, a blinding bolt of lightning striking him in the chest.

Archie dove in next. Then Angel in Warping Owl form. Javier reshaped matter and fired plasma energy blasts. Then Power, he was just standing there—watching.

They all piled on, beating the beast into the floor.

And that's when I knew.

This was it.

With one final surge of strength, I dashed forward, jaws glowing with celestial fury. I *bit down* on one of the Hydra's necks, and *RIPPED IT CLEAN OFF.*

Blood sprayed everywhere. The head didn't grow back.

I dropped it.

It was over.

I shifted back to my regular form, panting, trembling. One by one, everyone else morphed back too.

I stared at the fallen beast. "What the heck *was* that?"

Prince, still sparking with electricity, shook his head. "I don't know, but whatever it was... it was *definitely* from the Lunaranites. I mean, look at it!"

And then, *fwump fwump fwump*, the sound of wings.

I looked up.

A full Lunaranite army soared through the storm clouds, spears raised, scanning the city.

I pulled my daggers free.

"This is not a safezone anymore."

II

PART TWO

ECLITSIC AND MECHAMIO

⊙ #1.10 — The Nightmare ⊙

Lightning cracked across the stormy sky as I stared upward. The Lunaranites were already out, spears drawn, scanning the clouds for us.

"We gotta get outta here," I muttered through clenched teeth.

Prince shifted into his Lightning Bird form, electricity crackling around him.

"Where we even gonna go? If we fly, what about Sophia, Javier, Ella, and Olsen? They're land creatures!"

I turned to the squad. "Alright, we split up. You four stay grounded. Me, Power, Prince, Demaurion, Archie, and Angel, we take to the sky."

"But Don, isn't that crazy risky? The Lunaranites could find you guys!" Ella protested, worry thick in her voice.

I looked back up. They were already searching.

Then I looked down. Come on, Don. You're the leader. You gotta get this right. She's not wrong. If we fly, it could end bad—but I'll take that risk. I have to.

I turned back to her, eyes sharp with purpose. "We'll be fine."

I morphed into my dragon form, wings unfurling wide. Everyone else shifted into their beast forms. The rain came harder, the wind howled louder, more hostile by the second.

We launched.

The storm swallowed us whole. Lightning barely missed me as I pushed higher into the clouds. Archie flapped close, flames flickering wildly around his Phoenix body. The winds howled, the thunder snarled like some ancient monster, and I had to dodge bolt after bolt like we were in some kind of aerial war zone.

"Dude, you sure we're gonna make it? This is hella dangerous," Prince called, voice shaking.

I didn't respond. I was locked in, brain locked on survival.

The Hydra ambush... that was Dreadixz. Or maybe... someone worse...

I tried to stay focused. I heard it, battle cries. Lunaranite Scouts. They were on us.

I spun my head, five of them, armored in silver, wings gleaming, spears glowing with violent intent.

"GET 'EM!" one shouted.

I flapped harder. "MOVE! We gotta get outta here!"

My instincts flared, I twirled, dodging a flying spear that whistled past my cheek.

No more playtime. I surged forward with everything I had, and the others followed.

BOOM!—lightning nailed Archie. He shrieked and plummeted. "ARCHIE!" I screamed.

I dove beneath him, catching his falling body on my back. His flames flickered out—burned out. Now he was just a huge red bird, his Phoenix form dimmed.

But he was alive. I could hear his breath. Feel his heart.

I scanned the clouds for somewhere to land, nothing but storm.

Then, like a nightmare, a black figure riding a Lunaranite dragon slid up beside me. Dark energy coiled around him. Eyes

glowing red. Feral. Focused.

"Tsk tsk tsk... well well well... what do we have here?" he sneered from the shadows.

"Who are you?!" I shouted through the storm.

He clenched his fists, red energy cracked from his knuckles.

"You don't remember me? That's cold. I'm kinda famous, y'know... or at least I was."

He leapt off his dragon, punched me in the face so hard, I went flying down through the clouds.

"DON!" Prince screamed.

Archie slipped off my back. My wings buckled. My body quit.

No. No. No!

"I can't... I can't..."

Everything went dark.

Five days later — Eclitsic

I snapped out of stasis. Ice cracked off my scales as I pushed my eyes open to a frozen wasteland: flat white plains, squat igloos, and jagged mountains that loomed like teeth. Blizzard winds screamed through the air. The sky was nothing but falling snow; visibility dropped to a whisper. Snow piled on cliffs and frozen rocks, soft mounds swallowing everything in a sick, muffled silence.

I was still in dragon form, but when I tried to beat my wings, pain lanced through my joints. I crashed back onto the ice. Tiny ice spikes clung to the membrane, like nails, locking my wings. I must've been out for days. Six, maybe. My silhouette lay fractured and trapped beneath the glassy sheen of the ice. Stasis for real.

No time to panic. Find the beast. Move to the next world. That was the plan.

A massive boom rolled over the plain. My ears snapped to it. I bounded toward the sound even though the cold bit through my scales. When I reached the cliff edge, the landscape opened up and my stomach dropped. I wasn't on a field at all. I was on a tower.

Below, Jocabed and Emely were fighting, fighting him. The guy who'd punched me into next week. Or at least someone who wore his face. Shadows collided with snow as beasts lunged and shredded the air. One beast snatched Emely by her trident and hurled her across the ice like she was nothing.

Not on my watch.

I dropped back into my base form.

SHKKKKK.

The hood settled over my head.

The rings locked into place.

Celestial energy surged up my spine like a bolt of lightning.

CRRRRRRRAAAAAACK.

Purple-white energy crawled across my arms, dancing across my skin like living electricity.

The cliff beneath me couldn't handle it.

It shattered.

Chunks of stone rolled down the mountain, I jumped.

BOOOOOOOOOOOM.

The entire peak exploded behind me.

I became a violet comet tearing through the sky.

Clouds split in half.

Snow vaporized into steam, the freezing wind screamed past my face as the battlefield rushed toward me. Below, monsters swarmed like ants.

I hit the ground like a meteor.
BOOOOOOOOOOOOOM.
A crater erupted beneath my feet.
Ice and stone blasted into the air.
Entire groups of monsters were thrown backward.
The shockwave flattened everything in its path.
Snow raced across the battlefield in giant white waves.
For a brief moment...
Silence.
Then he stood.
Red eyes.
Clawed hands.
A grin stretched across his face.
I slowly raised one of my daggers and pointed it at him.
"WHO ARE YOU?!"
The wind howled between us.
"WHY ARE YOU HUNTING US?!"
Snow spiraled around our feet.
"I DON'T EVEN KNOW YOU!"
The man chuckled.
Slow.
Cold.
Wrong.
"Oooohhhh..."
His glowing eyes narrowed.
"So you really don't know."
The grin widened.
"Heart burning..."
The air around him darkened.
The temperature dropped.
Shadows began bleeding across the snow.

"I'm Incarceration."

A pause.

"Villain name..."

His eyes flashed crimson.

"Insane X."

My blood froze.

No.

The fourth strongest Zenith, that became a traitor. The monster from the stories that mothers and fathers would tell their children before they go to bed.

I tightened my grip on my daggers, then vanished.

FWOOOOM.

The battlefield distorted.

I appeared behind him.

SLASH.

Steel flashed.

A glowing cut opened across his cheek.

One drop of blood rolled down.

Just one.

His head slowly turned toward me, still smiling.

Something moved beneath the snow.

I stepped back.

The ice began breathing.

The ground bulged upward.

Cracked.

Split apart.

CRRRRRAAAAAAAACK.

Dozens of crimson eyes opened beneath the ice.

Long skeletal arms burst from below.

Then came the beasts.

Nightmare creatures clawed their way into existence.

Towering wolf-like monsters stitched together from shadows.

Spider creatures with human hands instead of legs.

Massive eyeless serpents whose mouths stretched down the entire lengths of their bodies.

A six-headed beast dragged itself from a pool of darkness, each head screaming with a different voice.

The snowfield became a living nightmare.

And Incarceration hadn't even lifted a finger.

"Meet my friends."

His smile widened.

"The things people see when they close their eyes."

The beasts charged.

Instantly.

I vanished.

FWOOM.

A giant wolf lunged.

I appeared above it.

SLASH.

Its head flew into the air.

Another beast leaped at me.

I spun.

SLASH.

Its torso split apart.

A serpent burst from beneath my feet.

I teleported.

BOOOOM.

The creature smashed through the spot where I had been standing.

Ice exploded everywhere.

I landed with both daggers glowing.

Five monsters rushed me at once.

I became a blur.
SLASH.
SLASH.
SLASH.
SLASH.
SLASH.
Purple trails painted the battlefield.
Monster after monster collapsed.
Bodies crashed into the snow.
But every time one died...
Another crawled out of the darkness.
Another.
And another.
And another.
An endless army.
As if fear itself had learned how to reproduce.
I gritted my teeth.
"Seriously?!"
The six-headed creature roared.
All six mouths fired crimson beams.
I launched upward.
The beams carved burning trenches across the battlefield.
I twisted between them.
One nearly grazed my leg.
Another missed my face by inches.
Then I drove both daggers downward.
"SPIN DROP!"
BOOOOOOOOOM.
A celestial vortex erupted.
Light swallowed the battlefield.
The six-headed monster vanished beneath the explosion.

The shockwave ripped through dozens of nightmare beasts.
Bodies disintegrated.
Shadows evaporated.
Snowstorms exploded outward in every direction.
When the dust cleared...
Incarceration hadn't moved.
Not an inch.
He stood there.
Watching.
Like a teacher grading homework.
I launched forward again.
CRACK.
The ground exploded behind me.
Celestial energy surged through my daggers.
SLASH.
His chest opened.
Blood sprayed.
I spun.
KICK.
His jaw snapped sideways.
ELBOW.
RIBS.
PUNCH.
UPPERCUT.
He staggered backward.
I didn't stop.
I appeared above him.
"50-50-50 CELESTIAL DROPKICK!"
BOOOOOOOOOM.
The impact folded the air itself.
A ring of celestial energy erupted outward.

Incarceration tumbled across the battlefield.

Crashing through nightmare beasts.

Crashing through ice.

Crashing through stone.

He skipped across the frozen ground like a pebble.

Then finally stopped.

I landed.

Breathing hard.

The battlefield was ruined.

Nightmare beasts littered the snow.

My daggers smoked with celestial energy.

Incarceration slowly rose, smiling and unaffected.

I blinked, "Why aren't you fighting back?"

Then he laughed like rusted doors opening deep underground.

Every single one of the nightmare beasts froze, turning to me.

Snow cracked beneath Incarceration's feet, "Don..."

His voice echoed unnaturally, "You don't get it."

The red eyes of every nightmare beast lit up simultaneously, thousands of crimson lights filled the battlefield.

The creatures began surrounding us like a living audience, watching the conversation.

Incarceration spread his arms, and the monsters bowed their heads, to him. "I'm not here to hurt you." The nightmare beasts smiled, every single one of them. "I am here to help."

The monsters disintegrated.

"What are you talking about?" I snapped. "You're a villain—not some therapist!"

I hurled a celestial spear.

He crushed it between his fingers, dust spilling like chalk.

Then he moved.

Two punches, fast, clean, my guard came up too late. A

spinning kick cracked my jaw sideways. He grabbed my head and drove me into the ice. My skull rang. He twisted, spun, and threw me through a wall of frozen glass.

I tore through it, shards screaming past me.

The chain snapped tight around my chest.

Everything jerked.

I was yanked off my feet, spun once, then hurled into open air. Wind ripped at my ears. My grip on reality slipped.

I reached for the dark energy.

It didn't erupt.

It folded in on itself.

Like a move I knew, knew, and still forgot.

The ground vanished.

Sound cut out.

I fell.

I hit metal face-first.

Cold flooded my hands as I pushed myself up. The space around me felt wrong—too small, too familiar.

Then I looked up.

A ceiling of red eyes opened one by one, blinking slowly.

Watching.

Incarceration's voice drifted down, calm, almost fond.

"You hated that sound, didn't you?"

Something grabbed me and yanked me upward, and I slammed into a gym floor.

Fifth grade.

The echo hit first. Sneakers squeaking. A whistle dangling in the air. I didn't need to look around. My body already knew.

Across the mat, my opponent staggered.

I saw the opening.

I went for the finisher.

My foot slipped.

Just a little.

Enough.

My balance collapsed. I hit the mat wrong, hard, awkward, stupid. Pain flared up my side, but that wasn't what made my chest lock.

It was the laugh.

One kid.

Then another.

Not cruel. Not loud.

Just there.

I tried to get up too fast. Slipped again. Someone snorted.

My face burned.

"No," I whispered.

The scene reset.

Same gym. Different match.

I rushed. Missed a step. Froze mid-combo.

The ref's whistle blew.

This time the laughter came faster.

My vision blurred anyway.

Incarceration stepped closer. The laughter looped, thin and sharp.

"They weren't mocking you," he said. "They were reacting."

The words hurt more than they should have.

"They didn't hate you," he continued. "They just didn't stop."

The sound filled the room, soft chuckles, whispers, someone covering their mouth like it was funny by accident.

"You remember the pain," he said. "But that's not what you replay."

The gym lights flickered.

"You remember standing there," he said, "knowing everyone

saw it."

My fists clenched. "I was a kid."

"So were they."

The laughter echoed again.

"When people laugh now," he said quietly, "when you miss a hit, when you trip over your words, when your friends tease you, why does it still feel like this?"

My chest tightened.

I couldn't breathe.

"Because you're not afraid of losing," Incarceration said. "You're afraid of being looked at the same way."

The gym tilted. Faces blurred into shadows, mouths half-open mid-laugh.

"They're my friends," I forced out.

A pause.

Then, almost gently:

"Then why does their laughter still sound dangerous?"

Silence swallowed the space.

He was behind me now.

"If they're going to look at you," Incarceration murmured, "make sure it's never when you're weak."

The classroom shattered.

The void rushed back in, cold and sharp—

—and a whistle cut through the dark.

I looked up.

The axe hovered inches above my face, perfectly still.

For once, I didn't flinch.

Because the blade wasn't what scared me.

It was the sound that might come after—

"AH—!"

I rocketed upright off the mat like the universe just hit me with a jumpscare. No warning. No mercy. Chest on fire. Lungs filing a formal complaint. I was breathing like I'd sprinted through a Category-10 blizzard wearing flip-flops.

Focus snapped in.

...Yep. Igloo headquarters.

The walls were stacked with glowing icy-blue crystal blocks, each one pulsing softly like it had trapped auroras inside. Every breath I took fogged instantly. Outside, the sun was flexing—violent blue sky, zero clouds, snow sparkling like it got dipped in diamonds. Penguins waddled by like this was normal. Like I wasn't two seconds away from questioning reality.

Quick systems check.

No stab wounds. No void scars. No missing limbs.

Hero suit: untouched. Sealed. Perfect.

Relief washed over me. Okay. No death cutscene. Nightmare confirmed... probably.

Then the temperature dropped.

Hard.

Jocabed slid through the ice tunnel.

Not walked.

Glided.

Her metallic white and deep-blue cybernetic armor hummed with blizzard energy, frost-light tracing every joint. Her Arctic Fox helmet turned toward me, ice-blue eyes narrowing beneath a sharp metallic brow. The scar across one lens crackled, kicking out tiny bursts of static snow.

Each step froze the floor beneath her boots, frost webbing outward before fading. Micro-snowflakes spun constantly around her like she existed inside her own weather system. Her cybernetic claws flexed once, cold blue energy trailing off them

in vapor.

"Bout time," she said calmly.

Her voice carried that quiet-but-deadly blizzard weight.

"You've been out five days."

I blinked. Hard.

"What—okay—hold on—everyone's here? Prince, Demaurion, Archie, Olsen, Ella, Angel, Power—all of them? And Incarceration didn't show up? He didn't pull up and start throwing hands with you or Emely or—"

The air shifted.

The cold sharpened. Electric. Charged.

Emely walked in.

Her ice-colored flight suit shimmered with moving frost patterns, light rippling like snow racing across glass. Razor-edged Ice-Bird wings unfolded from her back, crystal feathers refracting light into cold rainbows. Jagged crystal armor clicked across her shoulders and knees, shedding glowing shards that evaporated midair.

Her solid-ice boots rang against the floor. The triangular emblems on her chest pulsed like a frozen reactor keeping rhythm with her heart.

She spun her trident and the air twisted into a lazy snow vortex.

"What are you talking about?" she said, visor flashing as frost mist spilled from her breath, "Incarceration? Never heard of him, that name sounds made up like one of those villains people invent at three in the morning but everyone else yeah they're all outside waiting for you because you've been on ice for five days straight and they've been absolutely losing it like Prince tried to time your wake-up and then Archie dared him to poke you and then Olsen told them both that was a bad idea but Archie did it

anyway and—"

She did not stop.

Words poured out like an avalanche with opinions.

Jocabed sliced the air with one glowing claw.

The snow in the room froze mid-fall and shattered into glitter.

"Don," she said quietly, the blizzard around her tightening just a little,

"you've been thrashing in your sleep since you woke up. Where'd you get the name?"

My heartbeat slammed in my ears.

"...You don't know who Incarceration is?" I said. "He attacked us hours ago. I fell through a void. Everything went black. Then I crashed into the icy depths of Eclitsic and froze solid for five whole days."

They both froze.

Jocabed's storm stuttered.

Emely's chest emblems flickered out of sync.

They exchanged a look.

"Dude," Jocabed said softly, her storm lowering to a whisper, "I think you need to rest."

Hold up—hell no. They have to be hallucinating.

I'm 99.9% sure I saw Incarceration. I definitely fell through a void after going toe-to-toe with him. And I'm super sure I crashed into the icy depths of Eclitsic, freezing solid for five whole days.

Wait, am I losing it? Or was all of that just some crazy nightmare? Did that Hydra fight even happen?

Shaking off the fog, I stood up, stepped out of the igloo, and headed straight for training.

Maybe... just maybe, I gotta stop overthinking all this and focus on leveling up my moves.

Yeah, maybe it was just a nightmare...

⊙ #1.11 — The Frozen Temple ⊙

BAM!

Ice shattered after I slammed my fist into the wall.

"Yo, looks like I'm getting stronger," I said, eyeballing my fists.

Guess that means a fresh moveset is on the horizon.

This old one? Kinda stale now.

But now that I'm leveling up, new tricks, here I come.

Crunching through the soft snow, I headed toward the igloo where everyone was chilling.

Wanna know what's weird?

My wings are still frozen solid.

I thought that whole thing was just a nightmare.

I plopped down next to Ella.

Silence hung in the air until she finally broke it.

"Hey, what's up? Since the Hydra fight, you've been off."

Should I tell her about Incarceration and his whole "kill all your friends" thing?

She knows Insane X and would definitely help calm me down.

But... nah.

I gotta keep this on the down low for now.

"No, I'm fine..." I whispered.

I was not fine.

Memories kept replaying in my head like the worst remix ever.

People used to see me as a dork.

But now?

Maybe they see me as brave.

Maybe they even see me as a Hero.

It's hard to ignore the things you want to forget.

They always come back, like a boomerang you never meant to throw.

But here's the trick.

If bad memories won't go away, sometimes you have to leave them behind.

Focus on now.

Focus on the future.

That's what really matters.

"Guys, guess what?!"

Jocabed burst into the igloo, her eyes sparkling.

Sophia rolled her eyes.

"What is it, fox girl?"

"There are Power Gems in the Frozen Temple! So, we're all going through it!"

Prince immediately spit out his drink.

"GOING WHERE?!"

"NO WAY! Y'all gotta be crazy if we're heading into the Frozen Temple!" Olsen yelled.

Everyone slowly turned toward him.

I broke the silence.

"Bro, you literally dance for no reason."

"That's different!" Olsen snapped.

"Enough! We're going to the Frozen Temple because I said so," Jocabed declared.

I shook my head.

"Jocabed, why are you asking for a death wish?"

"For real. Remember what happened to the last explorers? They died," Archie added.

Angel stepped forward.

"Look, if we're after the Power Gems, it's worth the risk. It could give the prophecy a major boost."

The room went quiet.

We all exchanged looks.

Then one by one, everyone nodded.

"Yeah, sounds good."

"Sure."

"Why not."

"Cool."

"Good enough."

"We're the Chosen Ones!"

"Can't wait to die today!"

Emely looked down at the map.

"Good. The Frozen Temple is just north of here. We're in the middle of Eclitsic, so it's gonna be a long trek."

Ella's face immediately went deadpan.

"Three hours. Not thrilled."

"Power Gems though. We don't know how many, but the plural 'Gems' means more than one. Worth it," Javier reassured her.

Sophia popped her headphones on.

"Let's go before dark."

"DARK?!" I yelled.

"Dark in Eclitsic is a whole other nightmare. Not just night. I mean pitch-black. No stars. No moon. Nothing. You know I'm terrified of dark dark, right?!"

"Stop being a baby, Don. It's just pitch black. No big deal,"

Sophia said with a smirk.

I nodded very sarcastically.

"Yeah, Sophia. No crying when it's darker than the abyss. Totally fine. Right, guys?"

"Let's quit wasting time and move before this gets worse," Power said.

We all stood up.

One by one, we stepped out of the cave and into the freezing wilderness.

And that's when the real adventure began.

The sky was a wild mix of purple, orange, and blue.

The setting sun put on one last show as a blizzard slowly rolled across Eclitsic.

Wind howled.

Snow drifted.

The cold bit at my cheeks.

We trekked over endless sheets of white snow and ice, passing jagged mountains dusted in frost.

The ground was slippery, but thankfully my shoes had good grip.

Huge ice spikes jutted from the frozen earth like crystal spears, glowing with a soft icy-blue light.

Eventually, we crossed a frozen lake.

On the other side sat a small town.

A yeti town.

It was honestly kind of wild.

Large huts made from wood and stone lined the snowy paths. Massive white-furred yetis walked around carrying giant maces and bundles of supplies.

Some had wooden horns.

Others had long beards and sharp teeth.

A few of them looked at us curiously as we passed.

The blizzard grew harsher.

I wrapped my wings tightly around myself for warmth.

Then the sun vanished.

And suddenly...

Nothing.

No moon.

No stars.

Just pitch-black darkness.

This was Eclitsic at night.

Absolute void.

It got so dark I couldn't see a thing.

My tail began glowing purple.

Fear.

Yeah, I'm twelve, but I still freak out in the dark.

You never know what's hiding in the shadows.

Reality gets weird when you can't see.

Your mind starts making things up.

And then the fear creeps in.

I shivered but kept walking.

If I want to lead the Celestianites and fulfill even one-fifth of the prophecy, I have to face my fears.

Just like I did back in Musicia's casino.

After what felt like forever, we finally made it.

Thank goodness for Ella's night vision and navigation skills.

The temple stood before us.

Massive didn't even begin to describe it.

It looked like an enormous palace carved entirely from ice.

The structure towered over us, wide and majestic.

Its walls were built from slick, solid blocks of frozen crystal.

At the very top sat the silhouette of an owl, carved into the

structure like a guardian watching over the land.

The entrance was a giant pitch-black doorway.

Ella peeked inside and described what she saw.

Then we stepped in.

I couldn't see much at first.

Then Sophia switched on a lamp.

The place was stunning.

A long, narrow road of white and blue ice stretched into the distance.

To my left and right, thick frozen walls stood far apart.

Above us, icy stalactites hung from the ceiling.

Drops of water slowly fell from their tips.

"This. Is. Phenomenal," I breathed.

Jocabed's ears perked up.

"You know, historians believe this temple was built thousands of years ago during the Ancient Frozenanite Era."

She looked around excitedly.

"Some records suggest it wasn't just a temple. It was a containment structure."

"A what?" Prince asked.

"A containment structure," Jocabed repeated. "The ancient Frozenanites supposedly built massive ice sanctuaries like this to imprison entities known as the Mysterious Loose."

She lowered her voice.

"Nobody knows exactly what they were, but old carvings describe them as dangerous beings that couldn't be destroyed, only sealed away."

Far ahead, a huge rectangular door encased in ice waited for us.

To reach it, we had to cross a rickety bridge.

It creaked like it regretted every life choice it had ever made.

Suddenly...

CRACK!

Ice shards shattered above us.

The sound echoed through the temple like glass breaking in slow motion.

Jocabed's expression turned serious.

"The Legend of the Eclitsic Queen."

She looked toward the darkness ahead.

"They say she's still alive... but she took the form of the Owl Griffin."

A mysterious beast rumored to haunt this temple.

"Watch out for weird hoots," she added with a deadpan expression. "Some call her... Mysterious Loose."

We all froze.

Then Olsen squinted.

"Wait. 'Mysterious Loose'? Bro, that sounds like a terrible stage name."

"Yeah," I said, choking back a laugh. "Imagine getting hunted by something called Loose."

Prince started cracking up.

"You just hear a hoot and suddenly... 'It's Loose! IT'S LOOSE!'"

Archie doubled over laughing, flames sputtering from his hands.

"Ain't no way the queen turned into a bird just because she hooted too much!"

Every guy in the group snickered.

Jocabed tried to stay serious, but her lip twitched.

"It's true! She got obsessed with hooting during the war. Celestianites and Lunaranites fought here, and she cheered every day like, 'Hoot for justice!'"

Power snorted so loudly that it echoed through the entire temple.

"Imagine fighting for your life and hearing that in the distance."

He cupped his hands around his mouth.

"HOOOOOOT!"

We completely lost it.

Everyone laughed so hard that the bridge actually started shaking.

Ella face-palmed.

"Why would you tell them this?"

I grabbed my stomach.

"So let me get this straight. She hooted for three hundred and sixty-five days and then... boom. Owl monster."

"Exactly," Olsen said while wiping tears from his eyes. "She became the Glacier Loose, a beast extinct for thirty-five million years."

Power smirked.

"Back before Avangard was even a thing, I actually befriended one near where Eclitsic is now."

I groaned.

"Dude, we get it. You're old."

He grinned.

"At least I wasn't hooting my way into extinction."

That sent everyone over the edge.

We laughed so hard we could barely breathe.

Even Power had tears in his eyes.

Some of us started making weird noises from laughing too much.

Then suddenly...

CRACK!

An icy gust roared through the temple.

The laughter died instantly.

The air shifted.

Snow began falling harder.

A deep, guttural hoot echoed through the halls.

The sound sent a chill through my spine.

Everyone went dead silent.

Archie swallowed.

"...Y'all heard that, right?"

Just like that, the jokes were over.

No one dared laugh again.

We pushed through the door ahead.

Huge icy-blue stairs stretched downward into darkness.

Snow crunched beneath our feet.

Icicles shattered somewhere in the distance.

And the echo of that haunting hoot followed us the entire way down.

Then I slipped.

I smashed into a massive ice boulder, catapulting over it before thudding onto the frozen earth. Groaning, I pushed myself up, dazed. Somehow, we were outside. Dark gray clouds smothered the sky, streaks of snow slicing like silver needles. Full-blown blizzard. I yanked my dragon hoodie over my head—it helped a little, shielding me from the biting cold. The wind howled like an angry ghost.

Then I realized—we were on a towering, razor-edged mountain blanketed in blinding white. My suit was seconds from being swallowed whole by the storm. Behind me, the team scrambled up like a chaotic stampede. "Slow down!" I barked. Nope. They wiped out face-first in the snow. Classic.

Leaning over the ledge, my stomach dropped. Something

moved below. A dark silhouette. I activated Overview. My chest fell. A colossal Lunaranite Dragon. Scales gleaming faintly, icy eyes locking dead on us. Panic.

I ducked behind a snow-coated rock, my breath hanging in the freezing air as a low growl echoed through the blizzard. It started deep and guttural, almost too low to hear beneath the howling wind, but it kept building, rising into a monstrous roar that sounded like a lion fused with a spinosaurus.

The beast had seen us.

Worse.

It knew exactly where we were.

Me?

Done.

Its maw slowly illuminated with silver lunar energy, the light growing brighter and brighter until the snow around its jaws began to glow.

My eyes widened.

"Uh—WE GOT A BEAM INCOMING!!!"

We dove away just as the lunar blast erupted across the mountainside, obliterating the rock behind us in a blinding explosion that shattered ice, snow, and stone into a swirling storm. The shockwave swallowed us whole and launched us off the edge of the mountain like rag dolls.

Suddenly I was free-falling through a white void.

The blizzard spun around me.

Up and down didn't exist anymore.

Then a dark shape pierced through the storm.

The dragon folded its wings and dove straight toward me before twisting through the air, lunar energy wrapping around its body as it transformed into Dark Don.

His feet struck the snow, and he slid across the snowy moun-

tain, skating from side to side and scattering snow behind him while I rolled violently nearby.

He twisted his body and rocketed toward me, blasting snow in his wake.

I bounded over him, then flipped and landed beside him, racing down the mountain with snow spraying behind my back and cosmic energy streaming around me.

I bolted beside him, power surging as he sprinted next to me, our elbows grinding against each other as we rushed down the mountain.

"WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?!"

"YOU THOUGHT I FORGOT ABOUT YOU?!" he yelled back, lunging and hammering me downward with a punch.

I careened across the mountainside, tumbling and bouncing until I finally struck the ground.

CSHKKK!

My body skidded across the ice as snow erupted outward.

My feet slammed into the ground, and I kept moving, light energy crackling around me as I weaved between massive frozen spires.

He landed from afar, and I zipped past the pillars, bursting forward and launching chunks of ice into the air behind me.

I thrust my fist forward, crackling with energy.

"JUST QUIT THE TARGETING!"

He whipped out his lance and spun it, leaping toward me and smashing me into the ground with it.

BOOM!

I crashed into the ice. It shattered beneath me, blood flew from my nose, and I scrambled back up. I looked around.

He wasn't anywhere in sight.

I turned.

He twirled his lance in rapid blurs, striking my face with every third spin.

I whipped out my daggers.

He brought the lance down.

CLANG!!

The weapons collided, unleashing a shockwave across the land. I gritted my teeth and looked up at him, straining as we stood in the middle of the frozen battlefield.

He glared down at me, visibly pissed and completely unamused.

I glared back.

"We wouldn't be doing this right now if you could just tell me why you want to kill me so bad!"

"Because I NEED AN ANSWER!"

He swung his lance.

BAM!

The weapon slammed deep into my gut and sent me flying aside.

Then he dashed toward me, grabbed my neck, and drove me into the ground so hard that a massive shockwave rippled outward.

He tore across the battlefield, shredding the ice as he dragged me along the ground. Shards sprayed everywhere while he looked down at me through gritted teeth.

"YOU WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND!"

He lifted me and hurled me toward a frozen structure.

CRASHKKKK!!!

I burst through it and crashed onto the ground, celestial energy charging around my fists and rings as I tried amplifying it while getting back up.

I settled into my stance, spitting blood onto the ice.

"This is gonna hurt a bit..."

BOOM!

I blasted forward and shot through the air.

His eyes locked onto me. They widened for a split second before hardening again.

I tore through the sky and slammed into him, hurling ice backward as I wrapped my arms around his body.

I ripped through mountains with sheer force, plowing through one after another as I screamed,

"RAHHHHH!!!"

He slammed me down in midair.

I crashed hard enough for ice to explode into the sky.

I flipped backward just as he drove his lance down and landed. I blasted forward and threw a left hook, then a right.

He blocked the first punch and charged a lunar fist.

BOOOOM!!!

The strike blasted me backward as a lunar shockwave rippled across the battlefield.

I got up.

He grabbed my head and smashed it against his knee.

CRACK!!

My eyes turned completely pale white. My pupils vanished as pain surged through my skull.

He flung me aside and smacked his lance across my face.

Then he twirled it again and cracked it against my jaw, launching me into the sky.

I retaliated, charging with celestial energy and diving back toward him. I struck the ground with a celestial burst.

He wasn't in the crater.

I twisted.

FWOOSH!

A lunar blast ripped through the air and slammed into my body, hurling me across the battlefield before detonating.

My body tumbled across the frozen ground until I staggered back to my feet, fists crackling with energy.

He was nowhere to be seen.

Until—

FWISH!

I spun instantly and caught his fist before it could hit me.

BANG!

I headbutted him.

BAM!

Then I drove my knee into him.

I twisted around him and backhanded him across the battlefield. He tumbled and smashed through a frozen structure, dropping his lance.

Then he disappeared.

He reappeared at my flank, fists blazing with energy.

I turned.

He vanished again.

I looked up.

BAM!

He slammed both fists against my head, driving me into the ice.

The impact detonated in a violent blast of lunar energy, exploding into a white dome.

Smoke slowly rose into the air as I lay in a crater, energy faintly crackling around me.

Dark Don stood above me, lunar energy dancing around his fists as he stared down at me.

He slowly raised one fist.

"This is a decision that I had to make myself... and I don't

know if I'm truly making the right choice."

Lunar fire engulfed his hand.

"But it seems like I have no choice..."

He brought it down.

My eyes flashed.

VTZZ!

I disappeared, dropping onto a snowy mountain ridge and crashing into the ice as blood pooled from my nose.

My body was bruised. My Hero Suit was okay, and my rings were, of course, scratched.

I sighed and slowly got to my feet, brushing the snow off myself.

The blizzard raged on.

A chill crawled down my spine.

"...Where is everybody?"

⊙ #1.12 — The Mysterious Loose ⊙

I trudged through the soft, crunching snow, the wind whipping flakes across my hood as the blizzard blurred everything in sight. I kept my head down, hood up—just enough protection to last a few more hours in this deadly cold.

My wings looked normal again. Maybe those strange ice crystals finally melted off.

The wind howled around me, cold seeping into my bones.

"Geez, it's freezing," I muttered, shivering hard.

Visibility was trash. I couldn't spot my friends anywhere through the swirling whiteout.

I climbed a small hill of snow and looked out. Still nothing. Just stone and ice. "Was the temple really that small?" I mumbled. I scanned the horizon again and spotted it—a long, narrow frozen lake stretching between the snowbanks. My eyes widened.

I knew exactly where I was.

We'd been heading south through Eclitsic. That meant this was the Frozen Lakes. A place the Leviathan rarely visits... but not *never*. Fantastic. Half the group could be monster chow by now.

And that's when I realized—I wasn't alone.

A deep hooting echoed across the icy expanse.

I spun around. Nothing but snow and stone. My breath steamed in the frigid air.

"Who the heck was that?" I asked aloud.

The hooting came again—louder this time. Loud enough to rattle the ground and ring in my ears.

She was there.

A massive griffon-owl hybrid perched on a broken ice spire, feathers layered like forged frost armor. Her wings looked grown from winter itself—each feather edged in pale blue light pulsing faintly like a heartbeat trapped under glass.

Her eyes locked onto me.

Not searching.

Confirming.

Like I was already behind on my own death.

The beast insignia on her wing burned icy blue beneath shifting feathers.

Queen Frost.

She didn't move. Didn't need to. Stillness was the warning.

Then her head tilted.

"Oh," she said, voice smooth, sharp. "You're real."

I tightened my grip on my daggers. "You sound disappointed."

A cold exhale—almost a laugh.

"Oh no," she replied. "I'm intrigued."

Temperature dropped instantly.

Then she moved.

No buildup. No hesitation. Just launch.

Her wings detonated outward. Snow exploded off the cliff as her body erased distance in a blink—one moment on the spire, the next filling my vision with feathers and talons.

I threw myself sideways.

Not dodging—escaping where impact was already decided.

Her talon slammed down, carving a trench through ice and stone, the cliff shaking under the force.

I rolled on instinct, boots scraping snow, catching balance as she already rotated again.

Too big. Too fast. Too precise.

Her wings snapped forward—pressure wave first. Snow compressed into a blast that shoved me backward toward the edge.

I stabbed a dagger into the cliff mid-slide. Metal screamed. My body swung instead of falling.

Then—

A beam.

Ice condensed into a spiraling lance from her beak, drilling through air.

I dropped.

The blast carved through the cliff where I'd been, detonating rock into frozen dust.

I hit the slope below, rolled hard, snow bursting up around me.

Above, she hovered—slow, heavy wingbeats ripping avalanches loose with each cycle.

Her head dipped slightly.

"You're fast," she called. "For something breakable."

I wiped snow from my face, already tracking her movement.

Heavy frame. Wide turns. Every attack committed her mass.

Predictable.

"Yeah?" I muttered. "Then stop me."

I sprinted uphill.

Toward her.

Her head tilted.

I feinted left.

She struck instantly.

Empty air.

I was already right, carving up the slope, using angle and momentum to build speed. I forced her overshoot just enough.

Her body rotated to correct—and drifted over fractured ice above a drop.

Exactly the line I wanted.

She descended.

I launched upward into her space.

Her talon swept past my shoulder—heat torn from my skin.

I twisted midair, daggers drawn.

Time compressed.

Her wing came down.

I met it.

Steel hit frozen feather.

Impact rattled my arms, but I forced through—one dagger sliding into the wing joint, the other driving into the hinge where bone and muscle locked.

She broke rhythm.

A sharp shriek tore out of her. Her wing dipped mid-flap, snow exploding as balance failed.

She tried to recover—beak snapping, ice gathering—

Too slow.

I dropped under her body as her talon carved the space above me.

Snow scraped my face as I slid, pivoted, and launched off a buried branch like a spring-loaded weapon.

Arc timed. Wingbeat matched.

Release.

I shot upward into her chest.

Impact slammed like hitting moving stone.

Feathers burst. Her body jolted midair.

Her talon snapped toward me.

I twisted—barely grazing it—pain flaring down my side, but I used the hit to rotate through her guard.

Daggers rose.

One under the clavicle ridge.

One into the neck joint where armor thinned.

She screamed—no mockery left now. Just raw rupture.

Her wings flared violently. The injured joint failed to respond cleanly.

She tilted.

That tilt broke everything.

Gravity took over.

The cliff edge vanished beneath her shifting weight. Her body dropped out of control and crashed into snow below, shockwave blasting a white dome outward.

Silence followed.

Heavy. Final.

I stood at the edge, breath sharp in frozen air, daggers still glowing faintly.

Below, she lay half-buried.

Still breathing.

But slower now.

Her eyes lifted.

Still sharp.

Still refusing.

I exhaled once.

"Yeah… no."

I dropped.

Straight off the cliff.

Wind ripped past as I fell, body angled like a blade. The world

flipped vertical.

She tried to rise—too late.

I hit her in motion.

Both daggers came down together—one into the broken wing joint, the other into the center of her chest where frost energy pulsed like a second heart.

Her body locked.

Ice spiderwebbed across her form in an instant fracture pattern.

She let out one final sound—half scream, half disbelief.

Then I twisted the blades.

Clean.

Final.

The glow in her wings collapsed inward like a dying star.

Queen Frost went still.

Snow drifted down over everything like the world trying to pretend it hadn't just ended something powerful.

I pulled my daggers free with a frozen crack of breaking ice.

No words.

Just breath.

I looked up. The blizzard hadn't let up—snow falling harder than ever. Typical for Eclitsic.

Couldn't tell if it was day or night. The clouds were too thick.

"Ouch!" I winced, grabbing my arm. A sharp pain stung deep. "Seriously? A blister?"

Time to find shelter.

I wandered through hills, over lakes, past frozen rivers. Finally, I found it—an arch-shaped cave dusted with fresh snow, tucked into a forest of icy trees. Some bare, some still clinging to leaves.

The forest clung to the side of a snow-covered mountain. Creatures roamed—Hrics, Uragas, Ice Bears, even Frozen Dragons.

I stepped into the cave. Warmth hit me like a blanket. I didn't even need my wings to stay warm.

Squeak!

I froze. Ears twitching. Nothing.

Squeak.

Curious now. I stepped back—then felt something tug my tail.

I turned.

A Hric.

Small, bunny-sized, with fluffy ears like clouds and bright red eyes. It had sharp, almost elegant teeth and a pointed tail twitching like a rabbit's.

"Hey there," I said softly, waving.

It tilted its head and squeaked again. Odd. Aren't Hrics usually aggressive?

This one just walked up. Harmless.

I glanced around the cave. "This your place? Sorry, didn't mean to intrude. Just needed shelter from the storm."

It chirped and turned back inside. Then it paused, looked back, and chirped again.

"...You're inviting me in?" I asked.

I crawled in after it, leaning against the wall. The Hric bounced around the cave.

That's when I noticed the egg—white, striped with green dots—tucked near the edge.

Definitely not a Hric egg.

"Is that a lizard egg?" I asked. "Why haven't you eaten it?"

The Hric chirped again—almost like a laugh—and shook its head.

I stared. A peaceful Hric. Protective. Strange.

"Then why do you have it?"

It hugged the egg close, chirping softly.

Its thoughts were clear: it had found the egg, lost and alone. It just wanted to protect it.

I smiled. "You should return it. Just in case it's parents are out there."

The Hric nodded and started to roll the egg out. Then it saw my daggers and froze—terrified. It curled into a trembling snowball.

"Hey, don't be scared," I said, reaching out. "I'm not gonna hurt you."

It peeked out, still wary.

"I'm one of the good guys. A Chosen One. I help people. I slay monsters. You protected that egg. That's heroic."

It slowly uncurled. I reached forward and touched its nose.

A surge of warmth shot through me.

I petted it gently. "Name's Don. Don the Celestianite. What about you? Don't have a name, huh?"

It purred.

"How about... Kai?"

It bounced in joy.

I chuckled. "Kai it is."

Outside, the storm had passed. The snow lay still, piled high. Trees stood silent. Stars shimmered in a clear night sky. The moon cast silver light over the peaceful forest.

Finally, calm returned to Eclitsic.

I curled up in I trudged through the soft, crunching snow, the wind whipping flakes across my hood as the blizzard blurred everything in sight. I kept my head down, hood up, just enough protection to last a few more hours in this deadly cold.

My wings looked normal again. Maybe those strange ice

crystals finally melted off.

The wind howled around me, cold seeping into my bones.

"Geez, it's freezing," I muttered, shivering hard.

Visibility was trash. I couldn't spot my friends anywhere through the swirling whiteout.

I climbed a small hill of snow and looked out. Still nothing. Just stone and ice. "Was the temple really that small?" I mumbled. I scanned the horizon again and spotted it, a long, narrow frozen lake stretching between the snowbanks. My eyes widened.

I knew exactly where I was.

We'd been heading south through Eclitsic. That meant this was the Frozen Lakes. A place the Leviathan rarely visits... but not never. Fantastic. Half the group could be monster chow by now.

And that's when I realized, I wasn't alone.

A deep hooting echoed across the icy expanse.

I spun around. Nothing but snow and stone. My breath steamed in the frigid air.

"Who the heck was that?" I asked aloud.

The hooting came again, louder this time. Loud enough to rattle the ground and ring in my ears.

Then I saw it.

A massive white griffon-owl hybrid perched on a jagged cliff, eyes like molten ice locking onto me. There was the same beast insignia on her wing, glowing in icy blue. Queen Frost. Sharp, sarcastic, and lethal. Not a legend. A predator. And apparently, she loved a fight.

I drew my daggers. "Queen Frost. Didn't think you were real. Guess some nightmares survive."

She tilted her head, letting out a low, mocking hiss. "Oh,

I'm real," she said, her voice dripping with sharp sass. "And hungry."

With a flap of her wings, she launched at me. Snow and wind screamed around her, talons glinting like ice daggers. I rolled sideways, dagger slicing through the air, narrowly dodging a swipe that could have crushed me.

She fired a jagged ice beam from her beak. I leapt over it, sliding down the slope, snow spraying like confetti. She tilted her head. "Nice... but slow."

Her strikes were brutal, deliberate, claws and wings striking with the force of a freight train, ice blasts ripping through the snow. I dodged, rolled, slashed, ducked. The cliffside was a blur of white and frost.

But I noticed something: she was massive, and her weight made her movements slightly slower than her bluster. Her claws couldn't twist as fast midair, and her wings carried momentum I could predict.

I feinted left, then darted right, leading her over a narrow ledge. She followed, claws out, ice beam ready, and I waited.

The moment her weight shifted too far forward, I vaulted off a chunk of ice, swung my daggers in a spinning arc, and drove one into the base of her wing, the other under her chest.

Her wings faltered. She shrieked, angry, shocked, and maybe impressed.

I didn't stop. I rolled beneath her talons, slid along the snow, and slashed again, precise and calculated. Queen Frost's balance was off; the massive body of the griffon-owl couldn't pivot fast enough.

She tried to recover midair, firing ice beams, slashing, but I grabbed a thick branch lodged in the cliff, swung myself like a pendulum, and launched straight at her chest.

Impact. Claws swiped at me, but I twisted, tripping her slightly with my momentum. Her massive form stumbled, talons scraping the ice.

I didn't hesitate. Leaping, spinning midair, daggers glowing with celestial energy, I drove them deep into her shoulders and neck, twisting to cut off leverage. Queen Frost screeched, wings flaring wildly, snow spraying in every direction. Her momentum carried her forward, and then gravity took over.

She tumbled off the cliff, crashing into a snowbank below. For a moment, silence. Her breathing was heavy, slow. Eyes narrowed, still sharp, still full of sass, but she wasn't getting up.

I landed lightly on the cliff edge, chest heaving, daggers still glowing, sweat freezing on my skin.

"You... were impressive," I muttered, gripping my daggers. "But sometimes? The predator meets its match."

A final gust of wind carried her away, snow dust swirling in a halo around the fallen Queen Frost. She might survive, she might not, but for now... victory was mine.

I looked up. The blizzard hadn't let up, snow falling harder than ever. Typical for Eclitsic.

Couldn't tell if it was day or night. The clouds were too thick.

"Ouch!" I winced, grabbing my arm. A sharp pain stung deep. "Seriously? A blister?"

Time to find shelter.

I wandered through hills, over lakes, past frozen rivers. Finally, I found it, an arch-shaped cave dusted with fresh snow, tucked into a forest of icy trees. Some bare, some still clinging to leaves.

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even need my wings to stay warm.

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"I'm one of the good guys. A Chosen One. I help people. I slay monsters. You protected that egg. That's heroic."

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It purred.

"How about... Kai?"

It bounced in joy.

I chuckled. "Kai it is."

Outside, the storm had passed. The snow lay still, piled high. Trees stood silent. Stars shimmered in a clear night sky. The moon cast silver light over the peaceful forest.

Finally, calm returned to Eclitsic.

I curled up in my wings. Kai snuggled against my tail.

"Goodnight, Kai," I whispered.my wings. Kai snuggled against my tail.

"Goodnight, Kai," I whispered.

⊙ #1.13 — Desolate ⊙

Incarceration wandered through the desolate forest, where silence reigned and the air felt haunted. Darkness coiled between the gnarled black trees, and a thin mist drifted lazily in the breeze. The wind whispered like a tired ghost, brushing past him as he walked.

Distant screams echoed, twisted wails of Lunaranite spirits, and he smirked in amusement. Each step he took squelched against the soaked earth, as if the forest floor hadn't dried in a thousand years.

The howls of lurking beasts hummed through the air. Then came a loud, distorted screech, a sound that felt too evil to be natural. Incarceration's glowing red eyes snapped toward the noise, and his smirk deepened.

He changed course.

The deeper he walked, the worse the forest became. Tall, moss-draped grass concealed ancient Lunaranite skulls, cracked and forgotten. The foul howl came again, closer, rawer, more unhinged. He was getting warm.

Then the final cry rang out.

He didn't need to hear another. He was already close.

Incarceration's jagged grin gleamed in the moonlight, his sharp teeth catching the pale glow.

"Vironos... I know you're near. Out... now..."

Something rustled nearby.

A creature emerged from a leafless bush, slow and deliberate. A massive wolf, its body a swirling mass of black mist, stepped forward. Its eyes blazed a murderous light blue, tendrils of energy curling out from them like smoke. It stood atop a crooked wooden arch and stared Incarceration down.

The wolf hissed,

"So... King of Nightmares, huh? Yet you don't even got a kingdom. No throne. No people. Just your ego."

"Why are you slithering through my domain?"

Incarceration sighed, irritated.

"Because, Vironos, I need a favor. Awaken your soldiers."

Vironos growled, then let out a sharp bark of disbelief.

"Incarceration... You KNOW me and my crew are ILLEGAL. I-L-L-E-G-A-L."

"We're not allowed to engage the Illegals. And can't touch anything tied to that cursed prophecy."

He wasn't wrong. Vironos and his legion were known as the Illegals. Forbidden for multiple reasons:

They bore two beast traits simultaneously, considered unnatural and unstable. Their Elements were banned across all of Foreshade. Despite their brutal strength and combat experience, they were barred from war due to trust issues. They lied. They betrayed. They killed without reason.

Incarceration stepped forward and gently patted Vironos on the head, grinning slyly.

"These Chosen Ones? They need to die. Now. You and your army, you're the next phase. And if that descends... it won't wound to make more..."

Vironos stepped back, ears twitching uneasily. He turned his

gaze behind him, toward a row of enormous, ancient cocoon-like eggs. They were gray and stone-hard, sealed shut for years.

He exhaled slowly.

"Awaken my forbidden..."

A low crack rang out.

One egg split, then another, and another, until all of them trembled with life. From the first shell burst a towering creature, an Ankylodocus hybrid, its long neck stretching above the trees, armored like a tank. Its tail ended in a massive club, ready to flatten anything in its way.

Then the rest hatched.

Vironos shifted into his Drake form, unleashing a roar that shook the forest. The hybrid's metallic plating gleamed under the moonlight, shielding its body like a fortress.

Next came a blood-red Kraken, slime oozing from its massive tendrils.

Then an Azure Phoenix erupted from the flames of its egg, screeching with a voice like shattered glass.

Electricity cracked across the sky as a Magnetic Gyrfalcon emerged, red and blue magnetic electricity dancing across its eyes.

And finally, from the trees themselves, a massive Scorpion crawled forward, its body rusted, its claws twitching like they had a thirst for blood.

Incarceration raised an eyebrow and chuckled.

"Didn't expect the scorpion to come. But hey, I'll take her."

Vironos introduced them one by one.

"Dark Olsen, the Metallicslide Ankylodocus. Dark Prince, the Magnetic Gyrfalcon. Dark Archie, the Azure Phoenix. Dark Demaurion, the Bloody Kraken. Dark Ella, the Rusty Scorpion. Or just call them... Ironz, King, Azure, Darn, and Rusty."

Ironz - Metal Element
Alternate Olsen 19: cold, ruthless, calculating.
King - Magnet Electricity Element
Alternate Prince 19: serious, deadly focused.
Darn - Blood Element
Alternate Demaurion 19: controlled, sinister.
Azure - Azure Element
Alternate Archie 19: cold, methodical chaos.
Rusty - Rust Element
Alternate Ella 19: pretty dangerous if you ask me.
Vironos - Glitch Element
Alternate Eli 9968: glitchy, unpredictable, erratic.
He turned to them all.
"It's time for the mission you've waited lifetimes for...
It's murder time."

At Eclitsic

I woke up with this weird, gnawing feeling in my gut. The kind you get when you just *know* something's off—like the blizzard hit again. Pretty sure that's just a Tuesday here in Eclitsic, but hey, still unnerving. And honestly, it rarely happens at night, so yay for small blessings?

I glanced over to see if Kai was awake. One of his long ears twitched while he snoozed, like a big, snowy bunny with teeth. Nope, out cold. Guess he'll be sleeping for a while. I turned back toward the cave opening—

—and jumped out of my skin.

ALL my friends were sitting in a tight circle around me like I was some kind of sleeping exhibit at the zoo.

"WHAT ARE YOU GUYS DOING HERE?! AND WHERE HAVE YOU EVEN BEEN?!" I shrieked, flailing like a startled cat.

Angel, who was casually tinkering with some random device (probably dangerous), replied, "Oh yeah, we all found each other. Then we followed a trail of blood from your daggers after you, y'know... murdered Mysterious Loose."

I blinked. "You *what* now—"

Then I remembered. Oh. Right. That happened.

Shaking my head, I turned to look at Kai. He still hadn't met the crew. Gently, I picked him up, thankful he was still snuggled in dreamland.

"Guys, meet Kai!" I beamed, showing them the adorable snowy-white Hric like he was Simba on Pride Rock.

The moment they saw him, everyone collectively lost their *minds*. Full-on panic mode. Screaming. Scrambling. Pure chaos in a cave the size of a walk-in closet.

Archie banged his head on the wall. Jocabed tried to tunnel through the snow like she was in *Minecraft*.

"CALM DOWN!" I shouted over the madness. "He's *friendly*! He's not like the other Hrics!"

Demaurion immediately pulled out his trident and aimed it at Kai's face. "IF THAT THING BITES ME, I'M GONNA KILL IT!"

I snatched the trident out of his hands. "No, no, no! We are *not* killing anyone today. Kai's different. He let me stay in his cave, protected an egg that wasn't even his, then gave it up to reunite it with its mom. He's good. Trust me."

Slowly, the panic simmered down.

Kai yawned and stretched, finally waking up to the circus happening around him. He blinked at everyone, scanned their faces one by one... then *zoomed* out of my arms and *leapt* onto Olsen's head like a spring-loaded squirrel.

He bounced around on Olsen's noggin like it was a trampoline.

"I think he likes you," I chuckled.

Emely immediately launched into a ramble, "Okay, so this little carnivorous Hric is *suddenly* not a threat to Elementanite-kind just because he was nice to you for five minutes and now you think we should all be okay with that and then you just decide he's basically your pet now and—"

Yeah. We were all ignoring her at this point.

The snow outside howled like a banshee, muffling everyone's voices. I laid back on the cold stone floor and stared at the ceiling, letting my thoughts wander. Then a question hit me like a snowball to the face.

I turned to Angel. "Wait a sec. If you've got portal powers, why haven't you been using them to take us all over Avangard in, like, five seconds? We could be done with the prophecy already!"

Angel sighed like a guy who'd heard this a million times. "Because the prophecy doesn't allow it."

"Didn't Vigilzante make that prophecy? What did *he* say about it?" I pressed, staring at him.

Angel pushed up his glasses dramatically. "He said portal users *cannot* assist the Chosen Ones by teleporting them across Avangard. It's in an ancient scroll I read back at Insane Middle."

"Ohhh, okay, so teleporting is considered cheating. Got it." Makes sense... sort of.

The girls fawned over Kai like he was a living plush toy. Meanwhile, the boys busted out a relic of the past: a game called Stellar Card. Apparently, Power used to play this way back when the galaxy was still forming. Old-school stuff.

You needed at least ten players. The goal? Eliminate each other using a card-based battle system. There were five different Elemental cards, one of each per player. A 10-sided die decided

who went first.

Then the fight started. Play a card. Choose your opponent. If you won, they were out. If they beat you? You were toast.

Each element had strengths and weaknesses. It went something like this:

Fire < Water | > Ice, Magma, Plants, Light**Lightning** < Water | > Fire, Plant, Magma, Ice, Light**Earth** < Celestial, Time, Lunar | > basically everything else**Water** < Earth, Celestial, Lunar, Time | > most other Elements**Magma** < *everything* | > just Plant**Plant** < literally everything, lol

(I should really stop before this becomes a textbook.)

Also, you couldn't show your cards. Strategic mystery and all that jazz.

I whipped out a Time card. A rare one. I felt unstoppable.

Then Prince, *that smug lightning turkey*, slammed a Lunar card on mine like he just dropped the mic.

"HOW—WHERE—WHAT?!" I shrieked.

Prince smirked. "You've never seen a Lunar card before? Limited edition. Also shiny."

I narrowed my eyes. "Oh yeah? You sure about that, *boy*?"

I pulled out my Deluxe Celestial card and slapped it down on his dark violet Lunar like I was flipping the script of destiny.

Prince's face? Pure horror.

"NOOOOOOOOOOO!!!" he wailed.

"Out you go, buddy." I grinned.

Olsen facepalmed so hard I felt it in my soul. "Nothing we have beats Celestial. UGH!"

"Yup, Don wins. I feel like that if we had a limited edition Power or a silver limited edition Lunar card—we would've won," Archie grumbled.

Demaurion flipped the whole deck in fury. "I'LL KILL YOU,

DON!"

I kicked back, smug as ever. "What can I say? Celestial Champ in the house." I even busted out a little victory tail-shake dance.

And that's when the ground decided to join the party by violently vibrating.

I froze.

"...Does anyone else feel that?!"

Ella looked up, clutching Kai. "I hear it too—wait. I think it's an avalanche!"

Oh no.

The cave *split open* at the top, and rocks the size of soccer balls started dropping like celestial bowling balls. I threw my wings over my head.

"WHAT IN THE DISCOMBOBULATION?!"

We *bolted* out of the cave and into the icy wilderness, the earth *roaring* behind us. Sure enough, a full-on avalanche was tearing down the mountain. Trees flattened like paper. Snow boulders the size of trucks rained down from above.

"RUNNNNN!" I screamed, my voice fighting through the chaos.

As we darted through the trees, the forest being obliterated around us. They started falling from the top, straight at us, and more just kept coming, like a full-blown army.

We all bolted, sprinting through the forest clinging to the mountain's edge as the thunderous cracks of ice shattering chased behind us. Trees around us were obliterated like twigs, and while I was running, I noticed something.

I glanced down, my feet flying, and saw it: thin fractures splitting the ground.

I skidded to a stop.

My eyes lifted just in time to watch the avalanche unfold.

Long, jagged cracks tore through the mountain's surface from top to bottom, each one letting out a deep, earth-shaking rumble. My eyes widened in horror.

"Oh no..." I whispered.

I yanked Kai into my arms, teeth gritted as I looked up, then the whole mountain *exploded*. It crumbled into massive chunks of ice and stone, and from the middle of the chaos, a Leviathan's neck erupted from within the mountain itself.

Boulders and snow blasted into the sky, raining down like the apocalypse.

Beneath us, the very ground we stood on broke free from the mountain, transforming into a massive floating platform.

We were launched into the air, all of us scattering in different directions.

I finally landed hard on a snowy slope and immediately started sliding. Wind and snow whipped across my face, blinding me with cold and panic.

I held Kai tight, cradling him in my arm as I skidded downhill at full speed. I slammed through branches, dodged rocks, zig-zagging left and right like a human pinball.

I smashed through a boulder near a cliff's edge and flew off the ledge with Kai still in my grasp.

Below?

A pit of razor-sharp icicles waiting to turn us into frozen kabobs.

I summoned celestial chains, hurling them at the cliffside. They latched on just in time, jerking us to a stop midair.

Dangling there, I clutched Kai tighter as he chirped in fear and buried his head into my chest.

"You'll be alright," I muttered, sweat trickling down my face.

I glanced up at the glowing purple chains, holding onto hope

like my life depended on it—because it did.

"We'll be okay... *WE'LL BE OKAY!*" I kept repeating in my head.

But then I saw it. The Leviathan—the very same one that leveled the mountain—was staring down at me. Golden eyes. Snarl on its face. Its mouth opened in a roar that shattered the air, spit flying, pink tongue flailing like a monstrous whip.

How is it alive?!

I thought Demaurion killed this thing! Was it too strong? Did it fake its death? Leviathans *are* smart, after all...

Before I could even finish the thought—WHAM!

One of its massive tentacles slapped my chains. They snapped like twine.

"NO!" I screamed, plummeting toward the icicle pit of doom, Kai still in my arms.

This was it. Tail glowing purple, I shut my eyes tight. "I'm scared! I'm scared! I'm scared! I'm too young to die! I'm AFRAID TO DIE!"

I screamed in my mind.

But then, I felt something. Someone. A sudden force yanked us back, hurling us to safety in a flash of light.

And then... nothing. I blinked. Kai was still in my arms. I was standing—barely—on a sheet of glistening, slippery ice. "What the—who did that?!" I gasped, whipping my head around in pure confusion. Footsteps. Crunching on the ice. I turned—and there, stepping out from behind a block of jagged ice, was a figure. Just a silhouette at first... but his eyes? They were glowing green.

And in a voice low enough to send chills deeper than the cold, he whispered—

"Hello..."

⊙ #1.14 — Attack of the Leviathan Round 2 ⊙

The snow screamed past them, driven by a wind that chewed through armor and skin like it had personal beef. All around them, figures lay frozen mid-motion—encased in jagged crystalline frost, trapped like living statues. Snowflakes cut through the air, sharp as blades.

One landed square on Olsen's nose.

He blinked, green eyes glowing, and brushed it away as he stood. Ice cracked and slid off his shoulders in heavy chunks.

Ahead stretched a massive stone bridge, thick with snow, leading to a circular platform at the heart of the frozen wasteland. Two smaller bridges branched off, and another twisted toward a dark, yawning cave.

Olsen clenched his fists. Green energy pulsed. Each step he took shook the snow beneath him.

Behind him, the team started waking up.

Ella pushed herself up, tail flicking snow everywhere, golden eyes narrowing.

Prince jolted upright, arms thrown wide.

"OHHHHH, I'VE BECOME FROZONE!"

He looked around wildly. "'WHERE'S MY SUPERSUIT'?!"

Archie's wings sparked with fire as he groaned. "So much

snow... this environment is actively disrespecting my element."

"Sometimes the fire has to go down, Archie," Sophia said, brushing ice from her shoulders.

Jocabed landed hard, fists clenched, snow exploding outward. "Focus! Power Gems first, jokes later—preferably while alive!"

Emely zipped in frantic circles. "WHERE ARE WE?! WHY IS IT SO WHITE?! WHY IS IT SCREAMING?!"

Javier shuffled closer to Olsen, Electrical Katana crackling faintly. "Okay but like... real question... can we leave?"

Angel hovered above them, feathers catching the pale light. Blue portals shimmered faintly beneath him, already mapping exits, angles, contingencies.

Then the storm shifted.

The pressure changed.

Power the Zenith stepped forward.

He towered over them, radiant blue light cutting through the blizzard like it owed him money. Calm, steady, ancient, his presence alone made the wind feel quieter.

"Stay close," Power said, voice deep and steady. "I'll cover you."

Instantly, the team tightened formation without arguing. No questions. No panic.

Power gestured toward the frozen figures.

"The Waspinites," he explained. "Conquerors. A rival tribe—the Xeniths. Centuries ago, they tried to take Avangard by force. The Frozenanites stopped them... by trapping them here."

Jocabed frowned. "They're still dangerous, aren't they?"

"Yes," Power replied evenly. "Especially when provoked."

Prince immediately poked a frozen wing.

Crack.

Everyone turned.

Prince froze. "...In my defense, curiosity is my brand."

The ice exploded.

Waspinites shattered free, wings twitching, jaws snapping, eyes pitch black and hungry. The ground shook as the frozen army surged forward.

Power stepped in front of the team without hesitation, energy flaring.

"Behind me. Now."

Olsen raised his hammer. "Everyone, MOVE!"

The battle detonated.

Olsen smashed the first Waspinite into the ground. Ella weaved through the chaos, dropping enemies with brutal precision. Prince became a streak of lightning screaming something unintelligible. Archie's flames roared, *carefully*. Jocabed's fists burned like meteors. Emely's trident spun with surgical violence. Angel warped portals constantly, keeping everyone from getting overwhelmed.

"POWER GEMS—NOW!" Olsen shouted, charging the icy pillars.

"No!" Jocabed leapt, catching the falling Gems midair, energy stabilizing them as shockwaves rippled outward.

The temple groaned.

Cracks split stone and ice.

"THIS PLACE IS LITERALLY FALLING APART," Emely yelled, pointing at everything.

"YES, THANK YOU," Archie shouted back.

Angel opened portals in rapid succession, guiding the team clear as the structure collapsed behind them. Snow whipped past as sunlight finally broke through the clouds.

Prince flopped onto the ground dramatically. "SUNLIGHT. VITAMIN D. I'M HEALING."

"Don't relax," Olsen muttered.

Power stepped forward, scanning the area. "The calm won't last."

Right on cue, the warmth vanished.

Shadows twisted. Black energy coiled through the air.

Incarceration appeared.

"Impressive," he said smoothly. "You survived. Briefly."

Olsen stepped up. "Not today."

Incarceration snapped his fingers.

A swirling black globe erupted, devouring light, sound, heat. The world went still.

"POWER!" Olsen yelled.

Power thrust his hands out, blue energy flaring, shielding the team. "Stay together!"

The globe twisted, and dragged Power inside with Incarceration.

"No!" Olsen slammed his fist into the barrier. "We'll get you out!"

Inside the darkness, Power's voice echoed, still calm.

"...Okay. I'm going to be honest, this was not on my schedule."

Even trapped, his blue light held steady.

"Focus on the Gems," Power continued. "I can hold him for now."

A pause.

"...Also, if I don't make it back, tell Prince he still owes me a supersuit explanation."

The black globe drifted away as Incarceration moved, dragging Power with him.

At the Snowy Mountain

I stared in shock as the figure stepped out of the shadows.

It was Eli.

You know, *that* Eli — the kid who uses the Time Element, has Wyvern features, and never says a single word unless he's screaming an attack name like he's in a video game boss fight. He's 12, wears a gray jacket and blue jeans, has mixed skin and black hair swept sideways, almost covering his left eye but not quite. His dark green Wyvern wings folded behind him, and his black tail dragged along the snowy ground. Crackles of green temporal energy sparked around him as he turned toward the massive, shiny blue Leviathan looming ahead.

"Eli? What are you doing here?" I asked, completely thrown. "Did you come to find us or something?"

Silence. Obviously.

Probably using his ability to peek into the past and future — but only three times a day, which is both OP and inconvenient.

Then, without a word, he pulled out his weapon: a sleek, metallic dual-bladed sword. Blue with glowing green veins of energy running through it. Sharp as drama at a middle school dance.

I turned back toward the Leviathan's glowing golden eyes. "Alright, let's wrap this up. I got places to be."

I glanced down at Kai. "I don't know where you should go, little dude. Everyone's gone. Just... stay here and *promise* me you won't do anything dumb."

Kai bounced in excitement like this was a field trip.

I pulled out my daggers, crackling with celestial energy. Eli pointed his sword straight at the beast, face like stone. No fear. Just quiet fury.

We launched ourselves into the air, energy trailing behind us. Together, we slashed at the Leviathan's ear as we zipped by. I landed on its back, sliding along the icy scales before stabbing my dagger deep into its flesh.

I charged forward, dragging the blade across its back, leaving a trail of glowing blood. It jerked, throwing me off — but I whipped out my celestial chains mid-air, latching onto its ear.

I reeled myself in, launched forward, and kicked it in the face so hard a shockwave exploded on impact.

But the Leviathan was pissed now. It turned sharply and SMACKED me with its head like I owed it money. I crashed through the blizzard, cold biting every inch of me. Using the chains again, I hooked onto a tree and slingshotted myself back into the fight.

Tree to tree I went, energy building with each leap, until I soared through the air and shouted, **"GALACTICAL UPPERCUT!"**

BOOM.

My fist met its jaw and an explosion of light and force cracked the sky. The Leviathan roared in agony.

It lashed out with a tentacle — I barely dodged. Then another. I zipped right past it. The third one came, and I spun like a Beyblade, slicing it clean with my dagger.

I raised one blade to the sky, yelling, "TAKE THIS, YOU OVERGROWN UNDERWATER LIZARD WHO HAS NO BI—"

WHACK.

A tentacle sent me flying into the snow like a ragdoll. I crashed hard, snow blasting in every direction.

I gritted my teeth and climbed the broken slope back toward the monster.

"So, what, are we just gonna keep fighting this thing 'til one

of us gives up?" I muttered.

Suddenly, Eli teleported beside the Leviathan's face and hit it with a *hurricane kick*, then dashed again, *aerial kicked* its jaw, then vanished again. Dude was everywhere and nowhere at once.

But Leviathan got lucky. One of its tentacles smacked him mid-air and sent him crashing through several trees like a human bowling ball.

Eli reappeared beside me, quiet as always. I glanced over.

"Can't you just, like, hit it with a mega move already?"

He nodded.

Then... it started.

Timeless energy crackled around him as he smirked. He tapped his foot once. Again. Again. Each stomp sent green sparks flying, growing brighter and brighter.

"**Chrono's Ultimate: TIMELESS DESTRUCTION!**"

On the final stomp, *everything went dark* — like someone just deleted the sun. Pitch black.

His eyes lit up a blinding green as he began teleporting at hyper speed toward the Leviathan. His form blurred into a spinning green vortex, time itself unraveling around him.

He roared, **"CHRONOTROPIC SHATTER!"**

He ripped through dimensions like paper, phasing through whole universes, jumping timelines, and then—

BOOM.

He reappeared right in front of the Leviathan's face, unleashing a punch that shattered the *air itself*. Time cracked. Matter disintegrated. Space didn't even *try* to hold together.

A green shockwave burst from Leviathan's skull, blasting across all of Eclitsic. Mountains crumbled. The ground split. The world trembled.

Silence.

Eli dropped to the ground, arms crossed, unfazed.

Me? I was standing there like .

"WHAT WAS THAT?!" I screamed, totally fanboying.

The Leviathan let out a final groan and crashed back into the water, ice and snow exploding in its wake. The earth cracked beneath it as it sank out of sight.

I turned to Eli, who still hadn't said a word.

Bro.

When is this guy ever gonna talk?

I walked over and gave him a high five. "Nice job. Now, let's go grab Kai and find our friends. Oh, and by the way — teach me that move. That was NUTS."

We walked off, mostly me rambling, knowing full well he wouldn't reply.

I picked up Kai, who chirped in excitement.

But then I paused.

I looked at Eli's sword... at his wings... at the green glow radiating from them.

And I couldn't help but wonder... **"What tribe does this guy *really* belong to?"**

"Eli, is there something you need to tell me?" I asked, arching an eyebrow.

He wrote furiously, the words appearing in a blur:

I was supposed to be part of the Chosen Ones in the prophecy. My role was 'Celestial's Flight'—which used to be called 'Time's Fight'.

My eyes went wide, and my jaw dropped like it hit the floor. "Wait, what?! How were you—this doesn't make any sense! Since when?!"

Eli's pen scratched again:

Back when Vigilzante was writing the prophecy before he died, the rarest and most powerful Element was Lunar. He assumed only

Lunaranites would wield it, so he skipped that Element entirely. Then came the forgotten, lost tribe of Avangard—the Zeriath.

Zeriath was once connected to Avangard but drifted away as the earth aged, becoming a distant continent. Its people, the Nomanites, were born without any Element, mostly bearing Wyvern traits—some had none at all.

I was the only exception. Born with the Time Element. I can rewind time, travel to past and future, move at insane speeds, and manipulate time energy—either for destruction or altering the flow of things.

Vigilzante wanted me in the prophecy to lead the other Elements. But Avangard's Founding Fathers disagreed. Mark the Celestianite said the Time Element was cheating and didn't fit as the fifth Element.

Plus, I belonged to a forbidden tribe—no one from Zeriath was allowed in other parts of Avangard. Violation meant death. So, over time, Vigilzante removed me from the prophecy.

Then, when a Crystallized Celestianite with the Celestial Element appeared, Vigilzante replaced me. That was in 2013—the year you were born—the first Celestial user known to man.

After the war in 2013, Vigilzante died fighting Dreadixz. Wars kept erupting. The Lost Key? That was way before all this.

I looked at Eli—really looked at him now.

And suddenly, I understood why he chose to stay normal.

I dropped my gaze, the weight of guilt and sorrow pressing down. Just as I was about to speak, Eli cut in, flashing me another note:

I know you're sorry. It's not your fault. I'm not mad. I'm just glad to be a normal person, like everyone else.

I smiled softly. "Well, you could've been the Hero of it all, but... I guess this works."

We laughed as we trudged deeper into the snow, waiting for whatever was next.

Suddenly, wingbeats thundered above—hundreds of them. I looked up at the gray sky. "Eli—ears up, man, do you hear that?" I whisper-shouted, voice cracking like thin ice.

He tilted his head, green pupils spiraling—listening through time itself.

My heart rocket-jumped into my throat. "Okay! THAT'S OUR CUE TO LEAVE!"

We shot across the rink of permafrost, boots skidding, wings useless against the gale. War cries sliced the sky—

"THERE THEY ARE! GET 'EM!"

Lunaranite shadows eclipsed the moon like a swarm of angry inkblots.

Spiked ice tower ahead—natural ramp. I grabbed Eli's sleeve and slid baseball-style behind it, snow rooster-tailing everywhere.

Silence.

Eli didn't even breathe loud—pro-level stealth.

CRACK! CRACK!

Talons stabbed the ice on the other side—soldiers landing, snarling, arguing with their own echo.

Then Dreadixz dropped, blizzard parting like curtains.

"SOLDIERS! Find the runts. Incarceration and I will handle this talk."

"YES, SIR!" — wings scatter, none peering behind our tower.

Dreadixz rounded on the nightmare guy, voice low volcano:

"You unleashed the ILLEGALS?"

Incarceration's smirk twitched—first glitch I've ever seen.

"Yes. Remember our deal?"

"They're forbidden in Foreshade!"

"They're not forbidden everywhere," Incarceration answered, but his eyes kept flicking to Eli's side of the block—like he felt chronos static crawling over his skin.

Dreadixz snarled, launched skyward—probably to avoid whatever timeline smell Eli was giving off.

Incarceration lingered, boots crunching a slow circle.

"I smell something... Underview," he muttered, not to us—to the air itself.

SHOOT.

Underview = one glance = instant coal statue. No thanks.

He stopped directly in front of our block, back turned, yet voice drilling through the ice:

"Come out, little chickens... or shall I scramble the timeline?"

I froze—literally—ice crystals forming on my eyelashes. Eli's hand brushed my wrist: *Don't. Blink.*

Dark chuckle. "I admire survivors... but curiosity kills, Don. One peek..."

I sweated icicles.

"Maybe I lock your pals in a pocket dusk—forever," he hummed.

Then—globe of pitch bloomed overhead—my friends inside like fireflies in a jar.

Voices rained down:

"DON! GET US OUT!"

"SAVE US!"

"WE HAVE ALL NINE POWER GEMS!"

Jocabed—panicked, real.

Incarceration still facing away, whispering to the dark:

"Three... two..."

Green flash—Regeneration Gem clinks off my horn, lands glowing in the snow. Bait—but also key.

"ONE—"

"PLEASE DON'T HURT THEM!" I teleported—coal already crawling my arms—body locking, mind screaming.

Globe shatters—friends spill free. Prince, Ella, Kai bolt toward me.

Incarceration finally turns—eyes widening at Eli's silhouette behind the ice.

"Playtime's over, kids. Daddy will be back—when time isn't watching."

Snap.

He vanishes—but the after-image of his stare stays burned into the frost: two red dots that didn't dare blink first.

I can't move—coal to my neck—but I swear I hear him whisper to the empty air:

"Next time, Wyvern. Next time I bring a clock-stopper."

Oh, the stars...

⊙ #1.15 — Escape from Eclitsic ⊙

It was a freezing, blistering night as we pushed up the mountain through an ice storm. Icicles rained from the sky like daggers, snapping and shattering on impact. The sky loomed dark and stormy, thick with gray clouds.

I was draped over Olsen's back, my body still encased in a shell of blackened coal. Jocabed led the way, hauling a bag packed with the 9 Power Gems. Ella carried Kai close to her chest.

The storm pelted us with ice so fast it seemed to fall at the speed of light. Every step up the steep, snowy slope was a battle. The cold was too intense for Angel to open a portal to the summit.

The ice cracked as it hit my coal-hardened skin, turning to water and slipping away. Thunder rolled across the sky, followed by bursts of lightning that stabbed the earth. Somehow, no one was hurt—yet.

Then Angel glanced back—and froze mid-flap.

"Wait—is that Eli?!" he screeched, lightning crackling off his wings in shock.

"What?!" Sophia whipped around, headphones nearly flying off. "Nope, no way, he's supposed to be—"

"Banned from Avangard!" Jocabed finished, voice cracking like a whip. "Don, why is he here?!" Demaurion yelled, water sloshing from his shoes in rage. "NOMANITES AREN'T

ALLOWED PAST THE BORDER!"

"IF THE FOUNDING FATHERS SENSE HIM, WE'RE ALL DEAD!" Prince shouted, wings flaring in panic.

"When he was here, I thought he was helping for just a SECOND!" Ella snapped, clutching Kai tighter. "NOT CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN WITH US!"

Eli, trailing us like a silent green shadow, raised an eyebrow—unbothered, wordless, time-sparks flicking off his hoodie like neon snowflakes.

"He's still here!" Archie pointed, flames sputtering in disbelief. "That's a whole forbidden person in our party!"

"WE'RE GONNA GET BANNED—OR TURNED TO STONE—OR BOTH!" Prince panicked, zipping in tight circles.

"LESS SCREAMING, MORE CLIMBING!" Power barked, but even he shot me a look that said we're talking about this later.

"HURRY!" he shouted over the storm. "WE JUST NEED TO REACH THE CAVE AT THE TOP—THEN WE'RE AT MECHAMIO FOR GOOD!"

But the Lunaranites weren't the only thing chasing us anymore—guilt and panic were gaining speed.

"Don, you're explaining everything once we get into that cave!" Power yelled, voice slicing through the wind like a sonic warrant.

We pressed forward through the blinding snow and bitter wind until we reached a shallow cave in the mountainside. Jagged barbs jutted from the walls, and a large circular stone blocked the far end.

Olsen set me down. Emely stepped forward, conjuring icicles and slamming them into my coal-covered body. Blow after blow—until the coal cracked. While Power stared out into the sky, watching the Lunaranites fly towards them.

Finally, I burst free, stretching out my arms. "About time! Thought I'd be coal forever."

"Start talking, Don!" Sophia snapped, arms crossed so tight her headphones squeaked. "Why is forbidden boy still on our heels?"

Eli stood just inside the mouth of the cave, silent, green time-sparks crackling around his boots like he'd stepped out of a glitching video game.

Every pair of eyes ping-ponged between him and me.

I raised my coal-crusted hands. "Okay—OKAY—full context, thirty seconds, no detours! When the mountain split and we all got flung like confetti, I crash-landed on the Leviathan's iceberg—with Kai, don't ask how the fur-ball survived. Out of nowhere—bam—Eli phases in, sword drawn, time-energy sizzling. He one-shots the Leviathan's tentacle that was about to squash me, rewinds the ice shards so they miss my face, then teleports us both here while you guys were still sliding downhill. He saved my scaly butt. That's it."

Prince jabbed a lightning-charged finger at the air. "That doesn't explain why he's climbing the border mountain with us! Nomanites past the ridge equals Founding-Father fireworks—we get vaporized too!"

Eli lifted a single sheet of paper—already wet from melted snow—and scribbled:

I'm not crossing into Mechamio. I leave at the ridge.

He folded the note, tucked it into Prince's wing pouch, and tapped the paper twice—like, promise.

Demaurion exhaled a steam cloud of relief. "Fine. But if a sky-beam turns us into statues, I'm haunting you, Don."

"Get in line," I muttered.

Power snapped. "Get that rock out of the way!"

"Got it!" I nodded.

But just as we turned to leave, I heard the sound of wings slicing through the storm. I looked up.

An army of Lunaranites soared through the sky.

I froze. "What in the discombobulation....?" Then whipped around. "STELLAR'S BUNS! WE GOTTA MOVE—NOW!"

A massive Lunaranite spotted us and dove with a roar.

"SHIT!" Archie yelled. "OLSEN, MOVE!"

More followed, firing shadow beams down from the sky. One hit the mountaintop, rocking the earth. Ice and stone shattered and flew in all directions.

"OLSEN, FASTER!" Javier shouted.

"I'M TRYING!" Olsen grunted, straining against the boulder.

A beam blasted the cave, hurling everyone back. Prince slammed into the wall with a loud *THUMP* and crumpled to the ground.

The Lunaranites closed in.

"I'LL TAKE THEM ON!" Archie roared, eyes blazing with red and orange flames.

"No—ARCHIE, WAIT!" Power shouted, but he was already gone, a fiery trail streaking behind him.

He slammed into Dreadixz, gripping the creature's horns, trying to steer it. But Dreadixz roared, caught Archie in his jaws, and hurled him from the mountain.

"ARCHIE!!!" I screamed, racing to the edge.

Then, like a bolt to my skull—Incarceration's voice pierced my mind.

JOIN ME.

I snapped my head to the side, resisting the call. Celestial energy flared in my arms. I glared at Dreadixz, fury burning through my chest.

"COME AT ME, DREADIXZ!" I bellowed, louder than the storm.

I launched into the sky, fists glowing with celestial power. I slammed into Dreadixz with a punch so hard it echoed across the peaks.

The shockwave threw me back into the cave. I crashed beside Olsen and the rock—just in time.

Dreadixz shrieked in pain, a purple burn glowing along his jaw.

Before he could recover, Archie came out of nowhere—engulfed in flame.

"TAKE THIS, YOU PIECE OF MONSTROSITY!" he roared, punching Dreadixz square in the cheek.

The blast sent the beast spiraling through the storm like a flaming comet. His fall scattered the remaining Lunaranites like leaves in a whirlwind.

The explosion's shockwave cracked the boulder clean in half.

"Why didn't I think of that?" Olsen muttered.

Behind the broken stone—an exit. Mechamio awaited.

Blue skies. Calm winds. Peace.

"MOVE!" Demaurion shouted.

We rushed through the opening—and dropped.

"AHHHHHHHHHHH!"

Wind roared past our ears as we plummeted. We crashed onto cold metal just as the gates slammed shut above us.

⊙ #1.16 — Mind Games ⊙

Dreadixz roared in fury, his massive frame slamming again and again into the enormous boulder sealing the cave's exit. Each impact cracked like thunder—

But the stone didn't move.

Not even a tremble.

A faint pulse rippled across its surface.

Not stone.

A barrier.

"You're wasting your strength," Incarceration said, his voice calm—too calm—as his claw dragged slowly across the cave wall, the sound sharp and grating. "All you're doing is feeding your own frustration."

Outside, the storm began to weaken. Winds died down, snow thinning just enough for battered Lunaranite soldiers to stumble back into the cave. Bruised. Bloodied. Silent. They took their places behind Dreadixz without question.

Dreadixz stepped back, eyes narrowingin defeat.

"...This isn't natural."

Incarceration stopped moving.

Dreadixz raised a claw toward the surface. The moment he got close—

A force pushed back.

Invisible.

Absolute.

"Mechamio," he muttered. "It's shielding itself."

Incarceration's crimson eyes flickered with interest.

"A selective barrier..." he said. "It recognizes threats."

Dreadixz's wings folded slowly as his expression hardened.

"It's not stopping me because I'm weak," he growled. "It's stopping me because it knows what I am."

Incarceration stepped forward, raising his hand. A dense sphere of nightmare energy formed—tight, unstable, whispering with something deeper than darkness.

"With enough force—"

He flicked it forward.

The orb struck the barrier, a ripple spread across the surface, then faded like it had never existed.

Silence.

Even Incarceration paused.

"...Interesting."

Dreadixz exhaled sharply.

"So brute force isn't the answer."

Faint sunlight began bleeding through the edges of the cave. In the distance, the metallic groans of Mechamio echoed—alive, waking.

Dreadixz's gaze sharpened.

"Explain the procedure again."

"I'm not repeating myself," Incarceration snapped.

He turned, pacing slowly, each step deliberate.

"What matters is this—" his voice lowered, sharper now, more focused, "—the prophecy doesn't fall through strength."

He stopped.

"It falls when the Chosen Ones do."

Dreadixz's eyes narrowed slightly.

Incarceration turned his head just enough for one glowing eye to be seen.

"There are five of them," he continued. "Five anchors holding that future in place."

A pause.

"So we remove them."

The air felt heavier.

"I was given a directive," Incarceration said quietly.

Not to Dreadixz.

Almost... to himself.

"From something far beyond this world."

His fingers twitched faintly.

"A god that doesn't care about balance. Or peace. Or your war."

His voice hardened.

"It only cares about one thing."

He looked directly at Dreadixz.

"The end of the prophecy."

A beat.

"And if I deliver that..." a faint, twisted smile formed, "I'll be rewarded with something far greater than anything this world can offer."

Dreadixz didn't interrupt.

Didn't question it.

He just listened.

Incarceration continued walking.

"So this—" he gestured vaguely outward, toward the storm, toward the world beyond, "—this isn't chaos."

"It's the beginning."

His tone sharpened.

"Step one is Don."

Dreadixz's expression shifted slightly.

Incarceration's smile deepened.

"I've already begun reshaping him. Breaking him. Twisting him into something useful."

"Scourge Don."

The name lingered in the air.

"He's not just stronger," Incarceration continued. "He's disconnected. Unstable. Perfect."

He stopped again.

"We use him."

Dreadixz's tail flicked once.

"To do what?" he asked.

Incarceration turned fully now.

"To destroy Celestia."

Silence.

"Not conquer it," he added.

"Destroy it."

His voice dropped lower.

"Every tower. Every structure. Every Celestianite that stands in the way."

The cave felt colder.

"And Don does this for you?"

Incarceration shook his head slightly.

"No."

A thin smile returned.

"He does it for himself."

Another pause.

"We just make sure he doesn't realize the difference."

The distant sounds of Mechamio echoed again—louder now.

Dreadixz stared at the barrier once more.

Then back at Incarceration.

"...And when Celestia falls?"

Incarceration's expression darkened.

"Then the world loses its shield."

His voice dropped to a whisper.

"And the Chosen Ones lose everything holding them together."

A final pause.

"And then..."

His smile returned—cold, certain.

"We kill them. Even Don."

At Mechamio

"KAYSON?! KAYSON?! DUDE—STOP WHATEVER YOU'RE DOING, KAYSON!"

My voice ripped through the chaos like a blade.

Mechamio was unraveling. Screams bounced off metal walls. Citizens sprinted in every direction, eyes blown wide, tripping over gears, pipes, and each other like panic was contagious.

The ground lurched.

The stone monster—Kayson's full beast form—threw his head back and roared.

The sound slammed through the city, rattling buildings, shaking loose dust and rust that rained down like shrapnel. My chains bit harder into my palms as his massive, clawed fist started descending toward the bridge.

Cool. Awesome. We're about to get flattened.

Okay, Don—think. Fast.

If that fist lands, the bridge is gone.

If the bridge goes, we go.

End of story.

"STAY IN POSITION!" Angel shouted, knuckles white as he clung to the railing.

The bridge screamed.

Metal warped. Bolts snapped. The entire span tilted violently as the fist connected, shockwaves tearing through the supports.

That's when it broke.

The bridge *gave way* beneath us.

"ANGEL—" I started.

But we were already falling.

Chains tore free. Gravity punched my stomach upward. Wind howled past my ears as the city rushed up way too fast.

For half a second, there was nothing.

Then—

Blue light detonated beneath us.

Power the Zenith surged upward like a comet, one glowing hand sweeping beneath the falling crew. Energy snapped outward, catching us mid-drop in a wide arc of radiant blue.

The fall *stopped*.

Not gently.

Abruptly.

Like reality had slammed the brakes.

Prince flailed. "OH COME ON—I WAS EMOTIONALLY PREPARED FOR IMPACT!"

Power's grip held firm as the rest of the bridge collapsed behind us in a screaming avalanche of metal.

With a controlled motion, he lowered us to the street below. Boots hit pavement hard. Knees buckled. But we stayed upright.

Alive.

Power landed last, light dimming slightly as he straightened.

"Everyone okay?" he asked, calm like this was a routine drill.

Angel nodded. "All present."

Olsen exhaled hard. "That... would've killed us."

Someone in the crowd pointed.

"WAIT—IS THAT POWER?!"

Another voice followed. "HE JUST SAVED THEM!"

A ripple of cheers spread through the nearby streets—surprised, loud, awed.

Power acknowledged none of it.

He glanced up once at the ruined bridge... then stepped back, attention already shifting away from us.

Which was good.

Because Kayson wasn't done.

I bent over, hands on my knees, chest burning.

"Oh thank—thank everything—we survived..."

Bad timing.

Another roar thundered through the city.

See, Kayson's twelve. Same age as me. Built like a wrecking ball with zero off switch. He's a Stone Mover—Size Element—which means growing and shrinking is basically a hobby.

Max size?

Let's just say landmarks get nervous.

I knew him from Insane Middle School—yeah, that nightmare. Walking mountain. Bottomless appetite. His stone form was massive, ancient-looking.

And the way he eats?

Violent.

He ripped a long, narrow chunk straight out of what remained of the bridge.

SCREEEECH.

Metal screamed as it tore free.

Then he bit into it.

Crunch. Grind. Snap.

Like infrastructure was his comfort food.

Kai's ears flattened. His claws scraped the ground once—slow, deliberate. The Hric looked... impressed.

I still don't know why Kayson was even in Mechamio. He's supposed to be chilling in the Rufty Mountains with the other Stone Movers.

Instead, here he was, treating the city like an all-you-can-eat buffet.

"Mmph! This is incredible!" Kayson boomed happily.

"Can't wait 'til they rebuild it again in a few years!"

People around us slowly relaxed. The screaming died down. Citizens started moving again—like this was just another Tuesday.

Then Kayson started shrinking.

Tower to building.

Building to truck.

Truck to... nightstand.

He hopped down with a BOOM, shockwaves rippling through the streets.

Still chewing.

He lumbered over, swallowed the last chunk, and licked his fingers.

"Artificially fantastic," he said, grinning.

Up close, it was obvious—his entire body was stone. No skin. No give. Living rock. Not a golem.

Born this way.

I crossed my arms. "So. How was dinner?"

"Oh, great! Good seeing you guys!"

"WE ALMOST DIED," Demaurion snapped, blasting him with water.

It splashed harmlessly off Kayson's chest.

He laughed. "Hey! Sorry! I was just trying to get the bridge."

Then his eyes lit up.

"Wait—are you guys heading to the Avangard Battles?"

"Yeah," Olsen said. "Only to find the next beast for Don to kill."

Kayson practically vibrated. "Me too! Wanna tour Mechamio first?"

"Nope," I said instantly. "Kill and move. No sightseeing."

Sophia groaned. "Can we just get to Gordiman's Bothole already?"

Now—King Gordiman?

The dude's clueless.

Like can't-find-his-own-crown clueless.

And yet somehow, he still wears one.

The sun dipped low, painting the sky blood-orange fading into sapphire blue. Mechamio thrummed beneath our feet—gears clanking, pistons hissing, steam venting like a tired dragon exhaling.

Robots marched by, movements just a little *too* perfect.

And then the thought hit me.

Not should I kill my friends.

Something worse.

What if they're all still laughing?

The noise. Fifth grade. The looks. Incarceration replaying it all like a broken tape.

I wasn't running from monsters.

I was running from being judged.

"Don?"

Ella's voice cut through it.

"Yeah," I said quickly. "I'm fine."

She didn't believe me. But she stayed.
"And we're here!" Kayson said.
The Colosseum rose before us.
Steel. Gears. Violence.
Kai froze beside me, eyes locked on the pit.
High above, King Gordiman stood.
"WHO WANTS TO SEE THE CHOSEN ONES FIGHT?!"
The stadium erupted.
"Let me introduce... our Crystallized Celestianite—Don!"
The cheers hit hard.
"And his opponent—RYAN THE MECHANITE WHEELER!"
The pit exploded open.
Ryan landed in sparks and dust, drills spinning, ego maxed.
"OVER HERE, DON!"
Energy surged through my arms.
Kai bared his teeth.
I stepped forward into the sand.
"Let the battles begin."
And the storm answered.

10,000 Years into the Future, Celestia

The sky bled orange.

Not the warm, comforting kind—this was the color of a world giving up. A dying sun dragged itself toward the horizon, smearing sorrow across the clouds as a dystopian city rotted beneath it. Towers leaned at wrong angles, snapped spines of steel and concrete frozen mid-collapse. Streets were buried under wreckage. Fire ran wild through the ruins, crawling up walls and licking broken windows while smoke coiled upward,

thick and choking, carrying the stench of ash and melted metal.

Avangard was dead.

And standing above it all—alone—was Duke.

He sat on the edge of a shattered skyscraper, knees drawn in, one arm resting against them as neon-green energy crackled faintly along his cybernetic cannon. Wind rushed past him in low, endless whooshes, tugging at his hair, whispering through the city's hollow bones. His suit glowed in sharp contrast to the ruin: matte black plating sliced with vivid green light. A glowing V burned across his chest. Energy veins streaked down his arms. Jagged lines flared along his legs like fractures in reality itself.

His helmet—sleek, metallic, birdlike—reflected the burning skyline. A neon visor masked his eyes, but it couldn't hide the glow beneath.

Blood slipped from his nose.

Drip.

Drip.

He didn't wipe it away.

"...Did Avangard really have to end like this?" he muttered.

The wind didn't answer.

Duke leaned back, staring up at the fractured sky. "Out of every future... every branch... there wasn't another way?"

His visor flickered—timelines overlapping, collapsing, replaying. Cities burning. Heroes falling. Power Gems flaring—and failing.

"I travel ten thousand years forward," he growled, fists tightening, trembling, "just to watch everything die anyway?"

Silence.

"...There has to be one more timeline." His voice cracked. "One. Where the Heroes win. Where they don't."

A sound warped the air behind him.

A sharp, digital crrrrk—like reality skipping a frame.

Duke's head snapped around.

One neon-green eye flared brighter as the rooftop rippled, dust lifting into the air. Space itself bent, glitching and sparking as green static tore open a hole in the world. Pixels bled into existence, stitching together a figure piece by piece.

The distortion stabilized.

Boots hit concrete.

Eli stepped forward, fists clenched, hair whipping wildly in the wind. Green wyvern wings unfurled slowly behind him, catching the dying light.

"You're here..." Duke said, disbelief tightening his voice.

Energy buzzed between them.

Duke rose to his feet and removed his helmet in one smooth motion, setting it aside. "What brings you this far into the future?"

Eli's eyes never left him. "I was gonna ask you the same thing."

They stood facing each other, wind circling like a warning. Duke loomed taller—but Eli didn't flinch.

Eli moved first, pacing around him, eyes locked. "I came ten thousand years forward to make sure no chrono-bender wrecks reality again."

Duke's eye widened. "Again? How do I 'wreck' it?"

"Because saving the future is impossible," Eli said coldly, sitting near the edge of the roof. "Unless you mess with the past. Or the present."

Duke stomped forward. "You think I don't know that?!"

SNAP.

Time froze.

Duke locked mid-step, energy crackling uselessly around him.

Eli exhaled slowly, hair drifting in the frozen air as he looked over the dead city.

"You do know. That's an issue."

A green orb spiraled into existence above his palm—pure, unstable energy. He crushed it effortlessly. It shattered like glowing glass, scattering into the wind.

"The Power Gems don't fix the future," Eli said. "They poison it."

He turned back to Duke. "You already proved that. In another timeline."

His eyes hardened. "You shattered everything."

"Do you agree with me?" Eli asked.

SNAP.

Time resumed.

Duke staggered, catching himself. His jaw clenched.

"This is my time," he snarled. "My chance to be the universe's hero. If you want to stop me—" His eyes burned. "—you'll have to kill me."

Eli's wings spread wide. Timeless energy surged around him, warping the air.

"This isn't my choice," Eli said quietly. "It's yours."

Duke raised his cannon. Neon energy pulsed like a heartbeat.

"Then make your move."

Eli vanished.

BLITZ—

A green streak detonated into Duke's chest, launching him skyward. Eli followed instantly, slamming him down—

BOOOOM!

Duke hit the ground hard enough to send a shockwave ripping through the city. Buildings crumbled. Windows exploded outward.

Eli hovered above, arms crossed, aura blazing.

Duke fired.

A massive neon beam tore upward—

Eli phased straight through it.

FLASH—CRACK!

Eli appeared above Duke and drove his heel into his head.

KRAAASH!

The explosion tore buildings apart. Duke spiraled into the sky. Eli chased—green and black streaks ripping through clouds, twisting, colliding—

Duke slammed Eli midair—

Eli crashed through a tower—

Glass. Steel. Fire.

Duke reappeared above him, cannon glowing violently.

"Enough."

FWOOOOM—

The beam carved straight down, engulfing Eli in blinding green light. The impact formed a massive energy dome that rippled outward, shredding the city.

Debris burst apart—

Eli tore free.

Blood streaked his face. His wings beat hard.

Duke hovered before him.

"Duke," Eli said, breath heavy, eyes blazing. "You think this is heroic. It's reckless."

"You're twelve," Duke shot back. "You don't command me."

Eli snapped.

Time froze again.

He pulled back his fist—timeless energy screaming, green lightning threading.

Then—

SHATTER.

The punch landed.

Reality collapsed inward. A massive shockwave erased the city—soundless, absolute. The sky cracked. Time reversed violently—

And the alternate future vanished.

—

Duke blinked.

He sat on a school rooftop.

Sunlight. Blue sky. Birds.

Insane Middle School.

Iris Town stretched peacefully below—green valleys, winding rivers, Nomanites and Elementanties living quietly.

Duke stared at his hands, breathing hard.

He had something to finish.

⊙ #1.17 — The Arena Battles ⊙

The trumpets blared, echoing through the skies — the signal had been given. The battle had begun.

Without hesitation, I lunged forward, celestial energy crackling wildly around me like lightning in a bottle about to burst. I charged straight at Ryan, unleashing my deadliest combo.

I hit him with the Spin Drop, slamming him backward — then, before he even had a second to breathe, I teleported behind him and landed the 50-50-50 Celestial Dropkick. His body jerked forward through the air, but I was already there — I teleported again, this time right in front of him, and hit him with a Galactical Uppercut that shot him upward like a firework.

Still mid-air, I appeared above him. "Don't waste my time man," I muttered, slamming down with a Celestial Bash that spiked him to the ground like a comet. BOOM. He crashed hard, the earth cracking beneath him. But then—his feet started morphing. Metal twisted and folded until his soles turned into wheels, and suddenly Ryan was skating toward me like a blur.

I dashed forward to meet him, throwing a heavy right hook—but he dodged, sliding past with finesse. I didn't let up. I lunged forward, swinging a celestial overhand punch. He moved again—so I teleported in front of him, grabbed his neck mid-

motion, and slammed him into the ground.

Dust exploded everywhere. I hurled him across the field like a ragdoll, and he tumbled violently, scraping up dirt and chaos.

The crowd roared. I adjusted my gloves with a smirk.

"Nice one, Ryan," I called out. "But now... let me show you what I've really got in store."

I launched forward with a burst of speed that left a shockwave screaming behind me.

"RAVAGE!" I shouted.

I appeared directly in front of him and drove a single celestial punch into his gut — deep, devastating. The force hurled him into the sky, and I followed, pummeling him mid-air with a relentless flurry of punches, blow after blow keeping him airborne. And then—BOOM—one final punch launched him even higher, almost out of view.

Charging celestial energy deep in my core, I took flight, wings of dragonlight unfurling from my back. I shot up through the clouds, tracking him in the sky.

I darted through him four times in a blur, the wind howling. Then I roared:

"GALAXIES OUTBURST!"

With one brutal celestial axe-kick, I crashed into him from above. A blinding ring of celestial energy exploded outward, rocking the entire battlefield. Ryan plummeted, burning through the sky like a meteor. I wasn't far behind.

I soared through storming clouds that tried to hold me back—but I pushed through and caught up. One last celestial punch sent him rocketing into the dirt.

CRASH!!!

He hit the ground like a god falling from heaven, a massive plume of sand and smoke erupting from the impact.

"Not done yet!" I yelled, landing with a quake of my own.

I blurred forward again, teleporting so fast I left trails of glowing energy behind me. My movements zigzagged through space, designed to confuse. And it worked—I reappeared behind him mid-spin.

"SAVAGE SWEEP!" I called.

I swept him off his feet with one fluid motion, flipping him into the air. Before he could drop, I turned—both fists glowing, a tiny shimmering celestial star swirling on my right fist.

I drove that punch into his stomach like it was divine judgment. The impact created a shockwave so massive it rippled across the field—and Ryan went soaring sky-high once again.

Then—BOOM.

He crashed back down, creating a colossal celestial shockwave that shook the entire battlefield—even King Gordiman's throne trembled from the force.

I cracked my knuckles with a smirk.

"Alright... now I'm done." As the dust and smoke slowly cleared, there he was — Ryan, laid out flat on the ground, tongue sticking out like a cartoon character KO'd in round one. The crowd erupted. Gasps turned into thunderous cheers as they realized: the unbeatable champion... had finally fallen.

King Gordiman's face looked like the color had been drained right out of it. His jaw was slack, his eyes wide, frozen somewhere between disbelief and awe.

"There's no way!" he shouted, voice bursting with excitement. "No one's ever beaten the champion!"

Then, to my surprise, he beamed. "You know what? You deserve a reward for that performance."

From behind his throne, he pulled out a gleaming object — a silver dragon snout, forged from thick metallic steel. It gleamed

under the stadium lights, sharp edges giving it a sleek, deadly look, like it had been sliced down the middle... even though it hadn't. Four small holes lined the front of the snout, ending in a sharp, pointed tip.

I stepped forward and took it from his hands, inspecting it with a raised brow.

"So... what does this thing do?" I asked, rotating it in my hand, scanning every detail.

King Gordiman clapped me on the back, grinning. "Just slap it on your dragon hoodie!"

So I did — attaching it right onto the purple snout of my hoodie. The metal clicked into place like it was made for it.

"That's a Snoutzer!" Gordiman said proudly. "It enhances your energy output during combat — amps everything up. Oh, and by the way..." His grin widened. "What were those moves?! They were sick!"

I smirked and put my hands on my hips. "Just part of my arsenal. Decided to beef it up a little. Y'know, since I'm strong enough, might as well have a bigger moveset. I'm a Celestial User, after all."

That's when I saw it — that mischievous gleam flash across his eyes.

"Well," he said slyly, "if you can take down our champion... how about you face our biggest champion?"

My ears twitched. "Biggest? I thought Ryan was the top dog."

"He was," Gordiman said with a smirk.

"Only because we haven't released this one in years. He's been locked away for being too dangerous."

Then he pulled out a golden trumpet — and blew it.

The sound tore through the air like a blade.

"RELEASE CYBER DON!!!"

The crowd snapped to attention.

I blinked. Hard.

"CYBER DON?!" My voice cracked—half confusion, half *oh no, this is bad.*

Then I heard it.

FWOOOSH.

Rocket jets screamed overhead.

I looked up at the orange-stained sky and—

Yeah.

I fricked up.

A cybernetic figure ripped through the clouds like a living missile. Red eyes locked onto mine—glowing, unblinking, *hungry.* He angled down instantly, arms spread wide, fingers flexing into claws.

"Oh COME ON—"

I barely rolled away before he hit.

BOOOOM.

The impact punched a crater into the arena floor, shockwaves ripping through the stands. The crowd screamed. The ground bucked. I landed flat on my back, ears ringing, heart trying to escape my chest.

I looked up.

Standing in the crater was a towering robotic figure.

And he looked like me.

No mouth—just a smooth, silver mask carved into a permanent dead stare. His red eyes burned into mine like targeting lasers. His legs were sleek cybernetics—upper half slim and rounded, lower half thick, reinforced, ending in heavy thruster boots still venting steam.

At the center of his purple-plated chest sat a wide circular port—an exposed energy core, humming with restrained vio-

lence.

His arms were metallic silver—lean but terrifyingly strong—ending in razor claws that looked like they could shred buildings. His nose jutted sharp and angular, like a blade welded to his face.

His head was brown.

My shade of brown.

Same haircut. Same silhouette.

Just... hollow. Weaponized. Soulless.

This wasn't a robot.

It was a war machine wearing my face.

A bootleg.

A knockoff.

I pushed myself up, brushing dust from my suit. My jaw locked. My hoodie slid up, shadowing my face. I flexed my fingers—my gloves sharpened into draconic claws with a metallic *shhk*.

The rings around my wrists flared to life, glowing a low, ominous celestial purple.

I stepped forward.

Now it was close.

Close enough to feel the heat from his core.

Close enough to see the beast Mark throb brighter when I moved.

Man vs. machine.

"So this is how it's gonna go, huh?" I said, staring him dead in the eyes.

No reply.

Just a cold recalibration tilt of the head.

The crowd went feral—cheering like we were about to settle a legend at high noon. Energy crackled in the air. My stance shifted. Fists clenched.

My glare sharpened.

"Man versus robot," I muttered.

Then louder—

"Automated fists don't work on me, buddy."

The trumpets sounded, and the fight exploded into motion.

He dropped to all fours, digging his feet deep into the sand, carving trenches through the battlefield.

His thrusters flared to life.

BOOM!

He launched at me, streaking over the wasteland like a missile.

I balled my fists, celestial power crackling through my veins as I settled into a fighting stance. I spat into the dirt and locked onto him.

He's coming straight for me.

BAM!

He crashed into my chest, arms cinched around my torso before carrying me across the wasteland.

The audience exploded with cheers, finally witnessing the clash they'd been waiting for.

The landscape blurred past as he bulldozed forward with me trapped in his grip.

I hammered punches into his spine and skull.

"HEY! THAT'S ENOUGH NOW—"

BOOOOM!

He drove me through a stone wall.

Chunks of rubble erupted outward while a shockwave rippled across the colosseum, kicking up waves of sand.

Power surged through my legs.

"GET OFF!"

My boot slammed into him, hurling him across the colosseum.

I rose back to my feet, lowering my center of gravity while cosmic sparks danced across my frame.

"Okay, you're actually putting up a fight. Not bad for an old copy."

The glow intensified until it could be seen from the opposite side of the battleground.

I grinned.

"Let's finish this."

I exploded forward, ripping apart the terrain beneath me.

My form stretched into a violet blur, velocity climbing higher and higher.

He didn't move.

Meanwhile, my aura continued swelling, the world smearing around me from sheer speed.

I roared as a cyclone of light engulfed me.

"TAKE SOMETHING LIKE THIS, WILL YA?!"

BOOOOM!

I slammed into him with everything I had.

A violent burst of force detonated outward, whipping the atmosphere into chaos and sending a spiraling blast across the colosseum.

I clenched my jaw.

He simply stared back at me.

His optics whirred, narrowing into a cold glare as our arms locked together in a dead stop.

"You can't be that good... really..."

Cyber Don shook his head and pressed harder, ruby-red light flashing through his optics.

BAM!

His uppercut launched me skyward.

Blood sprayed from my nose as agony ripped through my jaw.

He surged after me, driving a right hook across my face before grabbing me by the head.

He glanced downward—

—and ignited his thrusters.

The wind shrieked in my ears.

BOOOOM!

He spiked me into the sand, unleashing a colossal shockwave that thundered across the battleground.

I backhanded him away.

He crashed below.

I sprang backward—

—and a crimson beam ripped past my face.

I landed and slid through the sand.

BOOM!

I whipped around.

The blast had already detonated.

Particles drifted through the air.

My gaze locked onto him.

His chest pulsed with molten-red heat.

This guy can fire projectiles too? Awesome.

VTZZ!

Celestial power crackled around my forearms.

I narrowed my eyes.

What happens if I throw some back?

I found out immediately.

I flickered from sight and tore toward him, my feet drilling across the terrain in spinning bursts.

The surface erupted beneath me as I vaulted upward.

Violet bolts rained down from above.

Each strike connected.

Each impact burst against him in brilliant detonations.

Sand geysered into the air.

BRASH! SHRA! CRACK! SHASH! SHROOM! PRWISH!

Another volley.

Another chain of impacts.

Then I dropped back down, sliding across the battleground while debris swirled around the machine.

At the center of the colosseum, thick fumes curled upward while clouds of sand swallowed him whole.

He couldn't track me.

Couldn't locate me.

That gave me an idea.

I studied him carefully through the haze.

Those hits actually hurt him. Look at all that smoke. He can't even see through this mess.

A grin crept across my face.

My hands clenched.

My aura blazed brighter.

The spectators on the Bothole began realizing it too, erupting into cheers as I finally gained momentum.

My eyes darted toward the silver walls encircling the colosseum.

Perfect.

I launched myself toward one and planted both feet against the surface before accelerating sideways.

BANG!

BANG!

BANG!

Every step fractured the wall beneath me.

My arms pumped as I circled the colosseum at hypersonic speeds, gathering more power while twisting mid-run and unleashing violet volleys toward Cyber Don.

Strings of celestial detonations erupted around him.

The haze thickened.

I heard systems malfunctioning.

I heard circuitry glitching.

More fumes poured upward.

Then came fire.

He couldn't see a thing.

I was winning this exchange.

VRRRCH!

Cosmic lightning surged into my palms before transforming into celestial fire.

I kept firing, hoping to overwhelm his systems as endless explosions engulfed him.

Then I kicked off the wall.

Shot skyward.

Power flooded every inch of me.

BOOOOM!

I crashed back down hard enough to shake the entire colosseum.

Without hesitation, I charged through the smoke, violet eyes scanning for his silhouette.

I shifted to the side.

Power surged through both rings.

AMPLIFICATION!

The glow intensified.

White-purple radiance flooded my hands as raw force overloaded my palms.

I blinked directly in front of him.

Left hook.

Right hook.

Uppercut.

Jab.

My fists became streaks of motion.

Electricity flashed through my eyes.

Strength flooded my veins.

The world darkened around me.

Then I unleashed a relentless barrage, every strike bursting with blinding flashes while keeping him suspended inside the cloud.

I blinked around him.

Above him.

Beside him.

Then twisted in front of him—

WHAM!

My ankle crashed into his side.

The impact vaporized the haze and blasted it away in a thunderous shockwave.

The machine's frame folded—

—and rocketed across the sky from the sheer force of the strike.The stadium detonated with cheers.

The noise hit like a physical force—walls shaking, banners rattling, thousands of voices crashing together into one glorious, deafening storm. Even Power leapt out of his seat, pointing at me like a proud menace to society.

"IT WAS ME! I TRAINED HIM, PEOPLE! THAT'S MY BOY!"

From the royal stand, King Gordiman practically launched out of his throne, clapping like he'd just witnessed a prophecy punch reality in the jaw.

I lifted my arms, dizzy on victory and adrenaline.

"Thank you, everyone! He was—uh—pretty hard to beat though—"

The crowd went feral.

"YOU DESERVE A REWARD!"

"PRAISE HIM!"

"I LOVE YOU, DON!"

"HE BEAT THE HELL OUT OF A ROBOT!"

"BECOME OUR NEW KING!"

I stood beside Cyber Don's collapsed body like it was my stage now. All this... just for beating a machine. With enough training, anyone could've done it. Without Power?

Yeah. I would've been cooked.

A heavy pat smacked my back.

Olsen stood there, chest out, eyes blazing with bold pride.

"Don. That wasn't luck. That was dominance."

I grinned. "Appreciate it, bro." We locked hands.

Prince zipped in next, skidding sideways near Cyber Don and circling him at high speed.

"Wowww—look at this dent! And this one! Oh, that one's spicy. Ten outta ten, would fight again."

Angel warped in with a shimmer of light, instantly kneeling beside the body, wings folding as his eyes scanned every inch.

"Structural damage: catastrophic. Heat fractures across the torso. Power output exceeded original design by—"

Sophia leaned on one hip with a smirk.

"Translation: Don beat this thing into a toaster."

Ella stepped closer, calm and steady, gentle eyes scanning all of us first—then the robot.

"Everyone breathe. No unnecessary risks. We just survived a war-in-a-minute."

In the stands, Jocabed lounged sideways with a grin while Javier covered his eyes like the violence personally offended him.

"I DIDN'T SIGN UP FOR METAL PUNCHING!" Javier yelled.

Jocabed giggled. "Relax, Javi. He only exploded emotionally."

Meanwhile Emely was vibrating at terminal velocity.

"THAT WAS SO COOL DID YOU SEE THE PART WHERE—OH MY GOSH—THE SKY—THE ROBOT—DON YOU'RE INSANE—"

Power's voice boomed from across the arena.

"YOU DID GREAT, DON! I'M PROUD OF YOU!"

I gave him a thumbs-up.

Angel tapped Cyber Don's chest.

"Scratches. Burn marks. Torn plating. Internal overload—"

Sophia squinted.

"Angel, bestie, it blew up. We noticed."

Ella's ears twitched. Her tail curled.

"...Does the robot normally shake like that?"

Cyber Don twitched.

Everyone jumped.

He twitched again. Faster.

Energy crackled from inside his core like a storm trying to claw its way out.

Demaurion stepped forward, water energy boiling around his fists.

"Say the word. I'll drown it in its own sparks."

Archie popped into the air upside down, already glowing with fire.

"Or—or—or—we throw it into the sky again and see what happens!"

Prince slid backward behind a pillar.

"I suddenly support long-distance fighting."

Power shouted from afar,

"IS EVERYTHING ALRIGHT OVER THERE?!"

Jocabed rose smoothly from her seat, shurikens of frost forming between her fingers.

"Something's wrong. Javi, with me."

Javier peeked through his hands.

"...Is the nightmare rebooting?"

"YES," I said. "Yes it is."

The ground rumbled.

"EVERYONE STAND FIRM!" I shouted.

Jocabed vaulted from the stands. Javier followed, eyes wide, drawing his white electrical katana with shaking hands. Emely scrambled after them without hesitation.

And then—

BROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!!

A RUBY RED BEAM annihilated the sky.

It split the clouds apart like torn fabric, flooding the entire stadium in crimson light. The shockwave blasted us backward like toys. I hit the dirt hard, vision spiraling.

That beam was massive. Blinding. Screaming with power.

And inside it—

Something screamed back.

The beam vanished.

What stepped forward wasn't the robot we defeated.

Cyber Don stood reborn in ruby inferno energy, flames licking across his frame, body larger, eyes flickering like corrupted stars. He lifted one sharp finger and slowly dragged it across his face.

"Still assertive... are you?"

My heart dropped into my stomach.

"YOU CAN TALK?!" I shouted.

"OF COURSE I CAN!"

Panic erupted. Guards scrambled. King Gordiman spun.

"WHERE ARE MY GUARDS?! MOVE THIS THRONE—NOW!"

Power rocketed upward in a blue arc and slammed into Cyber Don—

Cyber Don caught his fists.

With one violent motion, he yanked Power behind him and

slammed him into the stadium floor, cracking it open.

Prince's jaw dropped.

"BRO JUST UNO-REVERSED HIM."

Archie ignited fully.

"OH THIS GOT INTERESTING."

Demaurion growled, stepping forward.

"He touched Power."

Cyber Don vanished—reappeared—and bunted Power into the sky, launching the blue streak through the stadium glass like a falling star.

Then he turned.

Pointed at me.

My blood went cold.

Ruby eyes locked onto mine.

He charged—

Red energy erupted around his body and the world lurched sideways as he blasted forward in a violent surge.

FWOOOM—

He vanished.

The city snapped left—

I twisted right—

Red flashed again—

Too close—

His hand clamped around my throat and the sky inverted.

KRAAA—BOOOOM!!!

The ground swallowed me.

The crater didn't just form—it spread, ripping outward in a rolling ring as the land buckled and detonated in jagged waves. Earth and flame geysered past my face. Before I could rise, I was already airborne again—his throw sent me skidding through shattered rubble like loose scrap.

He drifted down through the dust.

Both fists drew back.

Red lightning coiled around his arms as his eyes glitched violently.

He opened his palm.

Light flooded the frame—

VZZZZRRR—SHRAAAAM!!!

The beam ripped across the coliseum in a screaming horizontal sweep. It swallowed the ground, swallowed the air, swallowed me. Pain detonated across my body as I forced myself forward through the blaze, sprinting through a wall of annihilation while the structure behind me folded inward, one collapsing row after another.

He snapped his arm back.

I staggered—

Then surged.

Celestial energy exploded off my legs and I tore upward in a violent violet flash, appearing high above him with energy snapping across my limbs.

Red blinked.

He was suddenly above me.

I jerked sideways in a jagged zigzag—

Violet split left—

Red cut right—

I lunged forward with both fists—

He caught me mid-charge and hurled me skyward.

The world spun.

I rebounded off open air and shot back down in a spiraling celestial dive—

He twisted sideways and kicked.

KRAAANGG!!!

I became a violet streak ripped across the sky and driven straight through a building. Steel burst outward in a cloud of dust and fire as I vanished through the far side.

The building collapsed behind me.

He hovered at a distance, watching.

Metal scraped with a quiet, almost smug sound.

"I hate that you don't talk," I muttered, wiping blood from my lip. "It's like fighting a microwave with anger issues."

Red tore through the clouds.

The city warped into streaking layers beneath him as he cut side to side through the skyline, weaving between towers so fast the streets below blurred into ribbons of light.

Mid-flight, he glanced sideways.

Across the city—

A violet streak shattered through another building.

He veered sharply—

Red carved straight through the structure behind me—

Then dropped.

BOOOOOM!!!

The impact sent a shockwave peeling outward along the street level. Towers trembled. Windows detonated. Concrete folded into dust.

I was scrambling up when his eyes ignited.

Twin red lances tore loose.

FSHHH—KRAAA-BOOOOM!!!

The explosion ballooned outward in a massive red dome, vaporizing everything it touched—buildings erased into fire and air. I staggered backward through heat and pressure—

He flickered.

Suddenly behind me.

One hand locked onto my back.

His grip tightened.

"Oh come on, at least monologue or something!" I snapped.

Snap.

The world spiraled.

We were already airborne, rotating around each other in violent suspension. He lunged forward—I vanished past his side. I reappeared behind him with a kicking arc—he blinked upward and slammed me downward in mid-air.

Gravity returned all at once.

The sky rushed up.

Red split sideways in the distance—

Then blasted forward.

Buildings sliced apart as he collided into me mid-fall, battering me through open space. My body cartwheeled as he struck again and again from shifting angles—front, side, below—each hit snapping me along a new vector.

He flashed directly in front of me, spinning so fast his legs blurred into a single ring—

Both slammed into me at once.

DUAL IMPACT—KRAAANG!!!

I crashed into the top of a metallic skyscraper and triggered an explosion of dust and steel. Before I could rise, the red streak slammed into me again, dragging me across the rooftop in a shower of molten sparks.

The red streak curved upward—

Twisted—

And flung me in a razor-sharp arc across the skyline.

I skimmed the rooftop edge, cheek grinding along metal as I slid. He vanished again.

I pushed myself upright, staggering. Something was wrong.

His strength—

It wasn't just higher.

It felt multiplied.

"Bro's on silent mode and still cooking me," I wheezed.

The red streak curved past a collapsing building and snapped toward me at full speed—

It smashed the structure I stood on, and I leaped just in time.

I blinked forward to the next rooftop, sprinted, launched again, rolled hard as my shoulder met concrete. My legs blurred into rotating rings of energy as I tore across rooftops at full sprint.

Violet ahead.

Yellow flashing above.

Red closing fast.

A shockwave tore through the building beside me. I lost balance, slid, caught the edge, then burst into a full lateral run across the side of a tower, arms swept back as energy roared behind me.

"CAN WE TALK ABOUT THIS?!!"

Red blasts answered.

FWOOM—FWOOM—FWOOM!!!

"Okay cool, guess not!"

I zigzagged left and right as explosions detonated behind my heels. Buildings folded and collapsed mid-stride. I flipped across another rooftop as fire tore through the one I'd left.

Glass shattered under every step.

A blast struck the structure beneath me mid-run—

The surface buckled.

I fell.

Wind tore past my face as the red streak dove after me like a guided missile.

Skyscrapers blurred into vertical ribbons.

A red beam split between two towers—

I flickered sideways and slammed into another building, skidding down its glass face with both hands carving trenches as the surface shattered under my grip.

The beam bent.

Turned.

Split straight through the building—

And struck me.

Time slowed.

The blast swallowed the structure around me as it punched through five separate towers in sequence, leaving collapsing shells in its wake.

I flickered upward at the last possible instant and burst into open sky.

I looked down, searching wildly—

"WHERE DID HE—"

BANG!!!

My body slammed into the titanic clock hand of Mechamio's central tower.

Too high.

The city below yawned impossibly far beneath me.

The tower shuddered.

Red light blinked in a spiraling orbit around the structure.

"Oh... crap."

The tower screamed.

Metal peeled away.

Red blasts rained down.

I launched off the clock hand and sprinted sideways along the tower's curved surface as blast after blast detonated behind me, ripping steel free in flying sheets.

Celestial energy roared around my legs as I ran.

The top of the tower tipped.

Debris and red sparks fell like meteors.

A beam snapped after me, tearing metal loose as it chased—

The entire tower began to crumble.

I launched sideways into open air as the structure blurred past me—

Red flashed behind—

And I was driven straight back into the falling ruin.

KRRRSSSHH—WHUDUDUDU—BOOOOOM!!!

The tower disintegrated around me.

And I fell with it.

The wind howled. Buildings smoked. Rubble still floated in slow spirals, frozen mid-fall as if the world itself was holding its breath.

Cyber Don blinked into focus, his ruby-red aura flickering violently, sparks of molten energy crawling across his metallic frame. His fists clenched, the air around him warping.

He said nothing.

Not a word.

I coughed blood, wiped it off my forehead, and glared. "You're just gonna stare at me like that? That's your villain vibe? Silent and shiny?"

His aura flared harder in response.

"Yeah okay. Menacing. Got it."

My chest burned, lungs gasping. Celestial energy flared wildly across my body, crackling, sparking, radiating in chaotic violet arcs. "If you're going to destroy everything... I'm the only one who can stop you."

He remained wordless, crimson arcs snapping across the air.

I staggered. My body screamed from every punch, every strike he had landed, as if trucks had flattened me a million times over.

Pain became rhythm, desperation became tempo. And then... a snap. Something inside me clicked.

Drums. Echoing. Deep, resonant. Heavenly. The city vibrated with them.

My legs started moving. Side to side. Lazy, almost zombie-like. But each step sent shockwaves tearing outward, cracking streets and buildings. My eyes flickered, glitching with violet light, energy writhing around my bones.

Cyber Don froze. His crimson aura sparked dangerously as he braced for me.

"No comment? Tough crowd."

I felt my bones pulse in time with the beat. My chest, my ribs, even my heart—they pounded with the rhythm, amplifying the celestial energy surging through me. Flames of violet and white exploded across my body, warping reality around me, twisting the very air.

I clapped my hands. The city screamed with the sound—purple lightning arcs spiraled around me, flickering buildings, tearing reality. I clapped again. Energy tore upward, reaching into the sky.

Eyes flashed. K... X.

"KX Mode: ENGAGED."

I threw my arms outward. A massive beam of violet light ripped from my core, screaming outward like the wrath of a dying galaxy. Buildings split, the earth groaned, the air warped, and Cyber Don was flung backward, smashing through a structure as debris showered around him.

Celestial energy engulfed me completely. Hair swirling like a radiant violet storm, eyes burning with twin letters.

I floated above the chaos, aura flaring.

"One... more... move. And it's over."

He braced in silence.

"Still nothing? Bro is committed to the mute lifestyle."

Then—I launched.

Violet streaking. Energy spiraling. City collapsing behind me.

The rest of the clash detonated across the skyline—teleports, beams, impacts, shockwaves tearing steel and stone apart—every strike shaking Mechamio to its core.

"VIOLET!!!!"

"VIOLENCE!!!!"

My leg slammed into Cyber Don's head—KRAAAK-BOOOOM!—a violet dome engulfing the city.

Smoke cleared—Cyber Don twitching.

I whispered, smirking, "One more move... and we're done for the day."

Clap.

Reality fractured into galaxies.

I punched the white orb—BAM!—violet cracks splintering outward.

"DIE!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Shockwave—BOOOOM!

Silence.

I snapped my fingers—SNAP!—Cyber Don collapsed in sparks and glitching light.

I looked around.

"What the heck happened?!"

The entire stadium was silent.

No cheers.

No screams.

No trash talk.

Just thousands of eyes... locked on me.

"...Uh," I muttered. "Did I overcook that?"

Then—BOOOOM!

The stadium erupted.

High above, King Gordiman leapt to his feet.

"THAT WAS THE MOST INSANE THING I HAVE EVER SEEN IN THIS ARENA!"

Trumpets blared.

A massive gold medal was brought forward, engraved with roaring dragons and celestial symbols.

"CELESTIANITE! BY AUTHORITY OF 2025's AVANGARD BATTLES—YOU ARE THE CHAMPION OF IT ALL!!!!"

The medal dropped around my neck.

It clinked against my chest.

And for the first time since the fight started—

I exhaled.

The crowd lost it again. Confetti cannons exploded. Fireworks shattered the sky. Victory-core chaos.

But I barely noticed.

Because all I could think about was...

That power.

My hands trembled. That surge had felt different. *Deeper. Wilder.* Like something inside me had shifted without permission.

Was this... my Celestial power? Or something else entirely?

"YO."

Ryan's voice cut through my thoughts.

I turned—and there he was, battered, standing by sheer spite alone. Dirt smeared across his face. Cracks in his armor. Wheels grinding uselessly. He squinted at me like I'd just glitched reality.

"Since when do you fight like that?" he asked, voice low. "Holding back all this time or what?"

I shrugged. "Guess I just lock in when I need to."

He didn't laugh. Didn't joke. Just stared, sharp-eyed.

"...Yeah," he muttered slowly. "That's what's weird."

He leaned closer, voice a whisper of accusation. "You don't fight like a normal Celestial User. That power... it's layered on top of something else."

I met his gaze. "You saying I cheated?"

He scoffed. "Nah. But I *am* saying you're hiding something. And whatever it is? It's not normal."

For a second, it felt like we were about to throw hands again.

Then Ryan clicked his tongue and turned, muttering over his shoulder.

"Whatever. Just don't let it blow back on you, hero."

Before I could overthink that any harder—

"DON!"

I nearly jumped out of my skin.

Power came sprinting across the field, eyes wide with adrenaline. Archie was bouncing like he'd just had a caffeine IV drip—chaotic energy practically screaming from him. Prince did a mid-air somersault and landed on his head, grinning through the fall like it was comedy hour. Olsen strode forward, trying his best to look bold, chest puffed up, but his legs were clearly shaking. Demaurion just slammed his fists together, glaring, rage practically emanating from him. Kayson lumbered behind them, thoughts already drifting toward whatever snack he could eat first.

Sophia's smirk was sharp, eyes calculating—sassy and ready for the next quip. Jocabed twirled lightly, dangerous grin on her face, clearly plotting something playful yet lethal. Emely jabbered nonstop, pointing and reacting to everything in a whirlwind of chatter. Ella's calm, collected aura grounded

the group, wings folded neatly, hands lightly glowing with protective energy. And Angel... well, Angel was busy analyzing the entire scene like some nerdy strategist. Glasses gleaming, wings twitching with excitement.

Power grabbed my shoulders, eyes wide. "That power spike you just had? I felt that from the outer gates."

My stomach dropped. "That's... not comforting."

"No time to celebrate," he said. "If that surge meant what I think it meant—then it's already started."

I swallowed. "Started what?"

Power pointed toward the dark tree line far beyond the arena walls, where twisted silhouettes clawed at the sky.

"The Grolian Forest."

III

PART THREE

SCOURGE DON

⊗ #1.18 — The Beginning of Scourge Don ⊗

Once upon a time, deep in the lush, dark green Grolian Forest, the night was alive with sleepy peace. Forestinites were tucked into the shadows, blending in with the undergrowth as they dozed. Fireflies drifted lazily, their glowing butts lighting up the dark like tiny lanterns. Snakes slid between the roots, silver under the moonlight.

Inside a small cave warmed by a flickering fire, everyone was fast asleep—well, everyone except me.

I was a crystallized Celestianite, thrashing like a feral beast and roaring my lungs out as nightmares crashed over me. My body wouldn't stay still. I was pacing, growling, slamming my head into the stone floor like some sort of unhinged maniac. Every time I closed my eyes, more humiliating memories flooded in—some so personal I could practically shrivel up and die. I scraped my claws against the walls, bellowing even louder, probably waking up half the Forestinites outside. I whipped around, tail lashing, and accidentally smacked something. Correction: *someone.*

Demaurion.

He snarled and lifted his blue, dragon-serpent head, rows of dagger teeth glinting as he hissed at me. Pale blue patterns

pulsed across his scales as he glared, looking about one millisecond away from eating me alive. Then, with a final growl, he flopped back down and went to sleep like it was no big deal.

I froze, panting, then slumped onto the ground. Curling up with my wings wrapped tight around me, I tried—*tried*—to sleep. But the second I closed my eyes, boom: an image of Incarceration's monstrous form slammed into my mind, plus another humiliating flashback that made me wanna scream.

So I did.

I let out another roar and staggered to the back of the cave, crashing into the wall. I just lay there, feeling hopeless.

A few hours later, morning finally rolled in. My eyes were stuck wide open, purple cracks spider-webbing beneath them. I shook my head, trying to wake up, but I was already beyond exhausted.

Birds chirped overhead. Little Hrics hopped through the grass. I shifted out of my dragon form and flopped onto the ground with my tongue hanging out.

Kai hopped over and settled onto my lap, chittering curiously. I forced a tired smile.

"I'm alright, Kai. Just lost a few hours of sleep... Doesn't bother me, though."

I glanced around and realized everyone else had already left the cave. With a sigh, I stood up and stepped outside.

The forest was a living painting: trees glowing with vibrant green, flowers bursting from every corner, vines curling up trunks. The sky was a deep blue, sunlight streaming down through the leaves.

Everyone was gathered around the campfire, sitting on logs and minding their own business.

You're probably wondering how we even got here. Long story

short: one Celestianite gave us a portal device a while back. We used it, poof—here we were. We hadn't met any new creatures or tracked down the next beast, so we figured we'd just camp out.

Ryan was already filming everything. Olsen was stuffing his face with a rock meal next to Kayson. Ella was in her cat form, curled up on the grass. Prince flitted overhead as a Lightning Bird, hunting breakfast. Power was training, and Archie was sitting carefully, probably trying not to burn the whole forest down.

"Morning, guys," I mumbled, my voice quieter than a mouse.

Sophia was brushing her hair. She shot me a look.

"Oh, it could've been better *without* all the roaring, thank you very much."

Demaurion bolted upright, snarling, "EXACTLY! WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT, MAN? DID YOU LOSE YOUR SCALES OR SOMETHING?!"

"Guys, everyone calm down," Ella said gently. "He's just... dealing with some stuff."

Prince landed beside the fire, talons crunching the grass as he tore into the Hric he'd caught.

"Seriously, though," he said between bites, "what was all that racket?"

I waved my arms like a panicked octopus.

"I—I'm sorry, okay? Ella's right. Just... nightmares. That's all."

"YOU BETTER FIX YOUR NIGHTMARES OR YOU'LL DIE IN MY HANDS!" Demaurion barked, still in his Leviathan form.

My eye twitched. I shifted into my Celestianite Dragon shape, my tail flicking red as celestial energy crackled across my scales.

"Woah, man! You know you're playing with *fire*, right?!"

Demaurion grew talons and crept closer, glaring up at me even though he was way shorter.

"AND YOU'RE PLAYING WITH SOMETHING *WAY* MORE DANGEROUS THAN FIRE!"

"LET'S SEE ABOUT THAT, NEPTUNE!" I shot back, teeth bared.

We squared up, pure murder in our eyes.

Then Ella squished herself between us, exasperated.

"Please, don't fight. It was *one* night. You're supposed to be mature heroes, remember?!"

I snorted and crossed my arms. "Fine. We'll settle this like men."

I raised my claws.

"Rock, paper, scissors... SHOOT!"

I threw scissors. He threw paper—then *switched* to rock right as I won.

"HEY! THAT'S CHEATING!" I yelled.

Demaurion smirked like the little gremlin he was. "NUH-UH!"

"YES, YOU DID!"

"NO, I DIDN'T!"

Before we could strangle each other, Olsen's massive tail club came out of nowhere and WHACKED Demaurion in the face so hard he collapsed.

"STOP ACTING LIKE CHILDREN," Olsen bellowed.

I blinked down at Demaurion, now unconscious.

"He'll wake up in a few minutes," Olsen said, grinning.

I shifted back into my human form, my tail finally losing its glow. Puffing out a wisp of smoke, I turned away with a huff.

"Hmph. At least *that's* over."

We all sat back down around the fire. Prince was still tearing

into his breakfast, so I quickly made sure Kai didn't see him chowing down on his distant cousin.

Kai eyed the marshmallows instead, so I gave him one. He looked delighted.

Hours passed in the warm morning air. Demaurion eventually woke up, rubbing his head and apparently forgetting all about the argument.

Then Emely broke the silence.

"So... how about we get Hero names?"

Power perked up.

"That could be fun—and maybe they'll stick once the prophecy comes true."

Angel stood on his log, looking very proud of himself.

"Alright. I'll go first. I'll be called... *Trix.*"

Silence. Absolute, cricket-admitting-he's-gay levels of silence.

Sophia tilted her head. "Trix? What does that even mean?"

Angel cleared his throat.

"Well, since my Portal abilities aren't really combat-focused, I figured I'd use them to trick people into going places they don't wanna be." "Say an opponent tried to fight me," Angel explained, gesturing dramatically. "All I'd have to do is teleport them into some horrifying environment, and bam—they're done."

Olsen smirked and announced he'd be called *Rockslide.* Prince went with *Voltron.* Ella chose *Dune,* Emely claimed *Froza,* and Jocabed picked *Blizz.* Demaurion, obviously, was *Levi.* Power stuck with *Power,* Sophia dubbed herself *Soundwave,* and Javier settled on *Operate.* Kayson had nothing.

And me? Yeah... I hadn't even thought of a name yet.

As everyone chattered about their new aliases, I started

scratching my head like a confused puppy.

"What should I be called?" I muttered to myself. "There's got to be something. A name worthy of Avangard's next Power."

I was still spiraling when Olsen's voice snapped me out of my brain fog.

"So, Don... what's your name?"

I froze, then felt it hit me like a lightning bolt. The perfect name.

"KX," I declared.

Everyone stared at me blankly, like I'd just sprouted a second head.

"What?" I protested, throwing my hands in the air. "I only picked it because whenever I use 100%—or even just 5%—of my Elemental Form, those two letters appear behind me! It just happened at the Avangard Battles, I don't know how!"

Power peered at me, then broke into a soft chuckle.

"Don, KX is a good name," he said, nodding. "Perfect, actually."

He settled back on his log, eyes thoughtful.

"Let me tell you all a story real quick before we wrap up the night," he continued.

"Back when Avangard was still being formed, the Grolian Forest was created. Each region had Celestianites assigned to guard it, and one of them was the legendary founding father—KX. His name stood for *Kai Xii.* It meant 'guardian,' or 'protector,' or even 'ruler of the multiverse.' Though honestly, KX wasn't really any of those things. He just lived quietly and minded his business."

Power's gaze drifted into the flames.

"When he died, he left one final wish: that a Celestial User might one day touch his grave. He'd never met one while he

was alive. KX's element was... unusual. If someone touched his grave while bearing a certain power, that would become their hero name forever. But no one knew what the name meant, so they never tried."

Then he looked straight at me.

"But when you were born, Don, your parents took you to Kai's grave when you were only two years old. You touched it. That was it—sealed. Now, whenever you transform, your celestial energy burns those letters—KX—right behind you. And if you ever push past 100%—like 120%—your pupils morph into the letters K and X. Some say it even makes you smarter, because KX was brilliant in his time."

"That's... pretty cool," Olsen rumbled, morphing into a Rockslide Ankylosaurus and sprawling on the grass.

I smiled shyly. "I know, it might sound a little whack, but... it feels right."

The sky slowly shifted from blue to a hazy pink and red as twilight crept in. Everyone relaxed, laughter echoing through the clearing.

Demaurion tried to prank Olsen by blasting him with a jet of water in his Leviathan form. Olsen barely reacted—just spun around and smacked Demaurion in the face with his tail club so hard that he was out cold for hours.

Prince flew off to hunt again while I played with Kai.

I pulled a marshmallow from the bag and lobbed it toward him. My aim was garbage—the marshmallow sailed way past Kai and rolled into the trees.

Kai immediately bolted after it, little claws clicking on the stones.

"Hey—wait up!" I called, hopping off the log to chase him.

By the time I caught up, the forest had gone pitch dark. The

trees loomed overhead, their huge leaves dripping with moisture. The grass was wet too, even though it hadn't rained.

"Kai?" I called, scanning the ferns. Nothing. No little hopping gremlin anywhere.

I was starting to feel that creeping, prickly sense of something being wrong.

Then, out of nowhere, Kai reappeared, perched on my shoulder with the marshmallow stabbed triumphantly on his sharp little teeth.

"Whoa—nice job, buddy!" I said, relieved. "Didn't think I'd find you out here."

The crickets started chirping again. An owl hooted—probably Angel, being nosy. Then came a rustle in the trees. I tensed, wings flaring open. My ears twitched at the faint scuttling. I turned my head, searching the branches. Something moved up there—then vanished.

A cold chill crawled down my spine.

Suddenly, I heard fast crawling. And the clicking of hooves. Whatever it was, it was moving *way* too quickly. But the shadows hid it completely. "Hello?" My voice came out embarrassingly shaky. "Is...anyone out there?"

My tail started to glow purple. "Whatever you are, this is NOT funny!"

Something snapped a stick in the dark. I flinched and started backing away, heart in my throat.

"Yeah, no," I muttered, still retreating. "Let's not waste any more time here."

I turned on my heel, Kai clinging to my shoulder, and booked it back toward the camp. Then I heard something barreling toward me—and something else crawling around the trees overhead. A bear roared in the distance. Some eerie, ghostly moan floated

through the air.

I was this close to just noping out of there when something sticky—and weirdly sweet—wrapped around me, yanking me off my feet.

"HEY! WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS?!" I hollered, flailing like an angry moth caught in a web. Whatever it was didn't answer. It just started dragging me across the forest floor.

I smashed through bushes, scraped past thorns, face-planted into leaves, and straight-up ate a couple branches on the way. Then it slammed me onto the ground, rolling me over and over until I finally skidded to a stop against a rock.

I hauled myself up from the dirt, scraping sap and who-knows-what off my clothes like I'd been cursed by every tree in the forest.

"WHO IS DOING THIS?!" I shouted, flailing like a slightly traumatized squirrel.

"WE ARE!" a chorus of gleeful voices screamed back, perfectly in sync, perfectly obnoxious.

Lonnie Mae — Forestinite (Mammal Lineage)

Lonnie was the first to drop, landing with the kind of precision and poise only a Forest Fawn with "teacher's pet" energy could pull off. Her tight light-green sweatshirt and skinny jeans were immaculate, and her short brown bob bounced with every careful step. That raccoon-tail scarf? Practically a uniform accessory. She smiled brightly, clipboard-ready in spirit, like she'd graded my behavior before I even blinked.

Mason — Blushinite (Mammal Lineage)

Mason just appeared beside her, calm as a cloud drifting past chaos. Hoodie soft, colors pink-and-cream, baggy pants practically begging for hugs. His cream-colored eyes barely shifted, his demeanor the embodiment of "quiet, chill, unbothered."

Kwa'asja — Earthnite (Mammal Lineage)

Kwa'asja slid to the ground in what could only be described as "lazy elegance." Her DIY jacket hung over a plain white crop top, braids framing her sleepy dark-green eyes. Red kicks tapped the dirt like she was reluctantly awake. Rocky Armadillo resilience? Yeah, she *had it*, but only if she was awake.

Daysni — Forestinite (Mammal Lineage)

Daysni phased in like a whisper in the wind, ghost-green eyes sparkling with gossipy delight. Her black crop top had a pulsing phantom skeleton, torn jeans fluttered slightly, and her transparent buns glowed eerily. She tapped her hooves on the ground like she was collecting secrets, and oh, she *was*.

Anhia — Earthnite (Mammal Lineage)

Anhia walked out of a tree like the moon itself had crowned her. Diamond hair, sparkling outfit, perfectly polished hooves—the full "I woke up gorgeous and nothing will ruin it" aura.

She adjusted her hair mid-step, glared at dirt like it personally offended her, and checked herself in the nearest reflective leaf. Caring about beauty above all? Check. Getting messy? Absolutely not.

Keyler — Forestinite (Insect Lineage)

Keyler descended a tree like a shadow, flipping mid-air and landing silently, every move calculated to annoy. Hoodie streaked with black and white webs, boots thudding softly. His mullet remained a crime against fashion.

Drake — Earthnite (Mythic Creatures Lineage)

And then... chaos incarnate. Drake came skidding out of a bush like a living avalanche. Freckled pale skin, messy curls, brown cargos, brown shirt—it was *aesthetic chaos*. Energy radiated off him in visible waves. He flailed, jumped, spun, and somehow ended up face-first in a mud puddle, grinning the whole time. Absolute hurricane of motion.

Before I could process:

SPLAT.

A mudball—direct hit to the face.

I wiped it off slowly. Exhaled. Tilted my head.

"In the holy name of discombobulation... what am I looking at right now?"

They all pointed at me dramatically, like a SWAT team about to make an arrest.

"YOU'VE BEEN SERVED!" they declared in unison.

"Okay, seriously—WHAT WAS THAT FOR?!" I snapped, arms flailing.

Lonnie Mae adjusted her glasses, pulled out a crumpled piece of paper, and cleared her throat. "You... you have violated the—uh—the number one rule of the forest," she announced. They all pointed at me again, eyebrows knitted in righteous fury.

"DON'T ENTER THE FOREST!"

My jaw *dropped*.

"WE PUT UP A CAMPSITE, AND YOU GUYS DID NOTHING! AND THERE ARE LITERAL EARTHNI—you know what? Never mind." I yelled, spinning on my heel, ready to retreat.

A tap on my shoulder made me whirl around—and scream like a toddler when Daysni materialized inches from my face in ghost form, cackling like a miniature poltergeist.

Sighing, I scooped Kai into my arms and started trudging back toward the camp. Stepping into the clearing of the so-called "Forest of Doom," everyone froze to stare at me.

"Guys," I muttered flatly, "we've got company."

Ryan immediately lifted his camera, grinning like a man possessed.

"Yo chat, guess who joined the stream!"

Olsen squinted past me.

"Who is it?"

Right on cue, the forest crew exploded from the trees, each striking a dramatic pose like they had an audition for *Epic Fantasy: Forest Edition*.

"You guys are here too?!" Olsen gasped, genuinely baffled.

"That's not all of them!" a voice called from above.

A shadow swooped down, landing on the cave roof—Fedjina, tallest of the crew, feathers gleaming with Falcon power. She

folded into humanoid form midair, arms crossed, long braids whipping around, sass radiating off her like heat from a forge.

Sophia rubbed her temples so hard I thought she might split in two.

"Please tell me that's it..."

Of course... it wasn't.

"RIGHT HERE!" a voice screamed from above.

A blur of motion tore across the sky, wings flapping like a hurricane. Midair, the shape shifted—William landed in a crouch, brown hair flopping, dust spiraling around his feet. Eleven years old, Forestinite Prehistoric lineage, Wind Elemental, ADHD-fueled chaos with energy so raw it practically hummed in the air.

"My wings feel *GREAT*! Flying is the best exercise!" he squealed, bouncing on the balls of his feet like he had spring-loaded shoes.

Ella practically vibrated with excitement, clapping her hands so fast they blurred.

"So you all came to join us? That's... so sweet!"

Mason, leaning lazily against a tree, extended a hand and casually morphed it into dough to snag a fallen berry.

"We're here to help protect the Grolian Forest," he said, voice low, eyes calm—like a lake reflecting the chaos around him.

Kwa'asja yawned from the corner of a fallen log, rolling onto her back with an unimpressed grunt.

"Do we *have* to be awake for this?" she muttered. Red sneakers barely touching the ground.

Daysni popped back into existence near my's shoulder, whispering secrets no one asked for, grinning wickedly.

"Did you hear what Mason *almost* did? Classic!"

Loves gossiping, chaos-adjacent, terrifying in the most play-

ful way possible.

Anhia floated down, adjusting her hair mid-step, sparkle radiating like sunlight on ice.

"Try not to get dirty, everyone. We *must* look presentable," she said primly, inspecting a leaf like it might smudge her diamond outfit.

Finally, Drake came barreling in, tail whipping, mud flying, wings flaring like a hurricane of energy.

"YOOOO! THIS IS GONNA BE EPIC!" he yelled, spinning in midair and landing on a stump with an earth-shaking thud.

Keyler slithered down a tree with a grin, black-and-white web-pattern hoodie streaked with shadow.

"Don't worry... I've already set up a few little surprises," he whispered, eyes glinting.

I pinched the bridge of my nose and muttered under my breath.

"Who invited these guys...?"

Then it hit me—like someone had ripped the sky open and shoved it into my head.

Not dramatic. Just *wrong*.

Incarceration's voice burned through my skull, jagged and furious:

Join me.

I staggered, wings flaring, eyes seeing the cave bend in waves of purple and silver. My heartbeat echoed like drums in a storm.

"—NGH!" I clutched my head. Forced the panic down. Turned to the others, then to the black maw of the cave.

"I'm... gonna check something," I muttered. "Don't wait up."

I slipped inside. Cold stone pressed against my back. Shadows stretched and twisted like living ink.

The thoughts came at me—sharp, spinning, vivid.

Why me?

Why is everyone staring?

What if I fail? *Everyone will see. Everyone will laugh.*

The prophecy wasn't a calling.

It was a spotlight with a magnifying glass that made every screw-up gigantic, glowing, impossible to hide.

And then the thought struck like lightning through my chest.

He wants me to kill them.

Not because he hates them.

Because I'll fail.

Because one bad move—one tiny slip—and the world will point and say: *This is the one we chose.*

My friends. The people who trusted me even when I didn't trust myself. The ones who laughed when I stumbled instead of turning away.

I pressed my forehead to the stone, feeling the cold seep into my skull.

They don't see it, I thought. *They don't see how easy it is for me to ruin everything.*

The cave seemed to pulse with my fear. Shadows twisted, colors bleeding off the walls: deep violets, electric blues, sharp reds flashing like warning signs.

"Don."

I froze.

Ella stepped forward, framed by a shaft of golden light that made the dust sparkle like fireflies.

I turned to the wall, hoping it could hide me.

"We should talk," she said.

"About what?" I snapped.

She sat beside me anyway. Her eyes calm, but sharp—emeralds cutting through the chaos in my head. "You barely sleep. You barely joke. You've been pulling away since Eclitsic."

Her gaze pierced me. "What happened to the Don who danced after every win?"

I swallowed hard.

"There's... something in my head," I whispered. "And it won't shut up."

She didn't interrupt.

"It shows me every embarrassing moment, every hesitation... twisting them into a countdown of failure. Everyone is watching. Everyone is *expecting* me to choke."

I finally looked at her. "Please... don't pretend you wouldn't see it too."

Her gaze didn't waver.

"This prophecy—it's pressure. It's perfect. And when I'm not..." My voice broke. "...I ruin everything."

I lurched to my feet, tail swirling with angry purple and blue.

"DON, WAIT!" Ella called after me.

But I didn't. I burst out of the cave, heart slamming against my ribs, and ran straight into the dark, sinister forest. Branches slapped my arms. The cold bit my skin. I didn't care.

I was done.

I stopped, panting.

Somewhere behind me, I heard roaring.

Closer.

Trees snapped and crashed to the ground. I spun, celestial energy crackling around me, lighting up the darkness in pulsing waves.

"DON, WATCH OUT!" Javier's voice tore through the night.

I barely had time to register the warning before the trees exploded outward.

A massive, nightmarish creature burst into the clearing—a towering monster of living wood and snarling roots. Four

thick legs slammed into the earth. Gnarled bark formed its skin, twisted and ancient, with a mane of thorny bushes running down its spine.

Carved deep into its chest, glowing through the splintered wood, was a green beast mark—pulsing faintly, like a living wound.

It charged. I bolted straight toward it, fists clenched.

Before I could swing, it swiped me aside with a single colossal claw. The impact sent me flying through the trees. My vision spun as my body slammed into the ground hard enough to rattle my bones.

Somewhere in the chaos, the monster crashed through the campsite.

I heard the campfire crack and hiss as a burning tree collapsed over it. Sparks scattered into the night.

Screams echoed. Sophia fired a sonic blast into the creature's back.

It roared and whipped its tail, smashing her into a tree. Prince dove from above, lightning pouring off his wings. The strikes tore into the monster's bark—but it moved too fast, dodging with terrifying ease.

Then it struck him mid-dive, hammering him into the earth so hard he didn't get back up. Olsen and Ryan charged together, weapons raised.

The creature swept them aside like toys.

Archie hurled a blast of fire, an eruption so bright it lit the entire clearing—

—but the monster didn't even flinch.

With a deafening roar, it unleashed a shockwave.

Everyone was thrown back. Weapons clattered uselessly across the ground.

Blood stained the grass. My friends lay in broken heaps.

Only one of us still stood.

Olsen.

He stumbled forward, clutching his hammer, every breath ragged. His body was bloodied, but his eyes burned with defiance. He leaped, swinging with everything he had left.

The monster struck first.

Its claws plunged through his chest.

Olsen's scream ripped through the clearing. Then, with a sickening snarl, the creature hurled him back—straight into the cave. I watched, helpless, as the entrance collapsed beneath a rain of falling rock.

"OLSEN!!!" I screamed, reaching out as tears blurred my vision.

Celestial energy poured off me in furious waves. My tail glowed, raging blue.

The monster roared once more and thundered back into the dark.

And then—

The last thing I heard was Olsen's voice, small and broken, echoing from behind the rubble.

"Don..."

⊗ #1.19 — The Realization ⊗

Power pushed himself off the ground as the last echoes of the fight died out. Smoke drifted low over the clearing, curling around snapped trees and scorched earth like it didn't want to let go.

He scanned the damage fast. Too fast.

"Sound off," he said. "Now."

Prince staggered upright and dropped out of his lightning form, sparks flickering and dying along his arms. Blood ran down his elbow. He wiped it on his sleeve like it was an inconvenience.

"I'm breathing." He glanced at Power. "Barely. But yeah."

Then, sharper—

"You could've ended that thing in seconds. Why didn't you?"

Power didn't answer right away. His eyes stayed on the dirt.

"I can't," he said finally. "This isn't my prophecy."

That hit harder than the monster ever had.

Silence.

William's fists clenched. "Then we stabilize Olsen and go after him. End of discussion."

Lonnie Mae shook her head immediately. "It's not that simple." She gestured to the ruined clearing. "We're already off schedule, we still have to reach the Rufty Mountains. If Don

doesn't deal with the beast or Dreadixz—"

"The prophecy fails," Prince finished, flat. "We know. And there was never a schedule."

Near the edge of the clearing, something white shifted.

Kai stood half-hidden behind a broken slab of stone—a small Hric, snow-furred, red eyes glowing faintly in the smoke. Blood stained the tips of his claws from the fight, but he wasn't focused on that. He was staring at the spot where Don had been standing.

His ears drooped.

He padded forward slowly, sniffed the darkened dirt, then sat there, tail curled tight around himself. He didn't make a sound. Didn't need to. The way his paws trembled said enough.

Ella hadn't spoken yet. She followed Kai's gaze to the blood soaking into the sand.

"So how are we supposed to stop anything," she said quietly, "if the one person everyone's counting on is gone?"

She looked up, eyes sharp despite the exhaustion.

"And before anyone says it—this isn't Don freezing up. This isn't him 'choking', something's been messing with him for a while now."

A few heads turned.

Kai's ears flicked at Don's name. He pressed his nose briefly to the ground, then looked up again, eyes shining—not feral, not angry. Just scared.

Ella took a breath. "It's Incarceration."

That snapped everyone's attention.

"So that's who he was," Jocabed said slowly. "He's been in Don's head." She shook her head. "Not giving orders. Not controlling him. Worse. Feeding him everything he already hates about himself."

Demaurion's eyes narrowed. "Explain."

"You've all seen it," Ella said. "Don overthinking. Second-guessing. Worrying about how he looks, how he sounds, whether he's embarrassing himself."

Mason joined in, voice hard. "So Incarceration turns that into pressure. Judgment. The feeling that the entire world is just waiting for him to screw up."

Kai let out a tiny, broken sound—barely a whimper—and curled in on himself, claws digging into the sand.

Ella glanced toward the trees. "That's why Don ran. Not because he's weak—but because he thinks when he fails, everyone will finally see him as the mistake."

While she spoke, Drake hauled chunks of stone off Olsen's trapped leg. Lonnie slid in beside him, vines glowing soft green as they wrapped around torn muscle and broken skin, knitting it back together inch by inch.

Archie shifted into his phoenix form, embers rolling off his wings. "So what—Incarceration's just trying to scare him?"

"No," Ella said. "He's isolating him."

A beat.

"If Don believes everyone's judging him... he stops trusting us. And once he's alone, Incarceration becomes the only voice left."

Prince looked away. "That's when he breaks."

"That's when he listens," Power corrected. "And that's how the prophecy twists."

Dark-blue sparks snapped across Power's hands like static before a storm as he stepped forward.

"We won't let that happen."

The group turned toward him—bruised, burned, exhausted, still standing.

"Don doesn't need another legend," Power said, looking up

at the night sky. "He needs proof. Proof that when he messes up—because yeah, he will—we're still there."

Kai stood and moved closer to Power, small but steady now. He tugged lightly at the edge of Power's cloak, then looked toward the forest where Don had vanished.

Power nodded once, like he understood.

"Incarceration's betting on judgment," Power continued. "On embarrassment. On Don believing he has to be perfect to matter."

His fists tightened.

"We're going to prove him wrong."

Sophia broke the silence. "I've got spare suits."

Ryan nodded. "Weapons ready in five."

Prince cracked his neck. "Then let's stop wasting daylight."

Olsen, pale but breathing, hauled himself onto Kayson's back. "Don better not apologize when we find him," he muttered. "I'm not letting him."

A few tired smirks flickered through the group.

Kai hopped onto the rubble beside Power, red eyes locked on the horizon, ears lifted now—alert, hopeful, terrified all at once.

Power looked into the darkness, energy humming around him like a promise.

"Hang on, Don," he said quietly.

"We're not judging you."

Kai pressed a paw to his chest, then pointed toward the forest.

Power finished the thought.

"We're coming to get you."

South of the Grolian Forest

Dark Don stood atop a low ridge, hidden beneath a knot of trees and brambles.

The night hung black and heavy, the moon cutting through ragged clouds in thin silver streaks. Crickets murmured. The wind sighed.

Then the rain came—cold, steady, tapping on leaves like impatient fingers.

Dark Don stepped out of the brush. Moonlight slid across his silvery scales as he descended the slick slope, landing in mud that swallowed his shoes. He scanned the clearing—ferns, shadows, nothing else.

"Hmph. Not here."

Thunder cracked. Lightning tore open the sky.

And in that flash, he saw him.

Don.

Hanging limply in a tangle of thorns, his hero suit torn to shreds, dust and blood staining every inch. His hood drooped; his gloves had split open, claws showing through the seams. The shredded scarf around his neck fluttered like a fallen banner. His face hung low, hidden in shadow.

Everything went still.

Dark Don stepped closer, brushing Don's cheek with the tip of his tail. Rain and mud smeared across Don's skin. He pulled back, eyes narrowing.

In Don's hand rested a hexagonal black gem, swirling with slow, poisonous energy.

The Incarceration Gem.

Is he dead? I could end him here. But... what if he already is?

Dark Don's gaze shifted—and froze.

The Grolian Beast lay beside Don, green blood spilling from its bark-like hide. Its massive neck was snapped clean, bones jutting out like broken branches.

Dark Don's stomach tightened.

"Don... are you—"

"KX FORM!"

Celestial energy erupted in a white explosion. Dark Don was launched across the clearing, skidding through mud.

He barely raised his head before Don tore free from the vines, wings trembling, blood dripping from fresh gashes.

"WHO DARES WAKE ME FROM MY REST?!"

The voice wasn't his. Not anymore.

Don stalked forward, eyes blazing.

Dark Don wiped his mouth. "The hell is wrong with you?!"

Don didn't respond. He dropped the gem with a dull clink, dark celestial energy pulsing around him.

"I see you've crawled back to challenge me again," he growled. "Don't waste my time."

His wings flared. His scarred tail lashed the ground.

Dark Don rose, lunar energy coiling around his fists. "Fine. Let's settle it."

They slammed into each other, the shockwave splitting the night. Celestial and lunar energy tore through the forest, flattening trees in every direction as they rocketed upward.

Don struck first—relentless. Punch after punch hammered Dark Don's guard. Dark Don countered with a brutal elbow to the jaw, but Don only snarled and axe-kicked him straight back to the earth.

Dark Don crashed through a line of trees.

Don fell on him like a comet, smashing into his chest and shaking the mountainside.

Before Dark Don could breathe, Don yanked him up and hurled him through five trees in a row, each one exploding on impact.

"SCOURGE DON'S FATE!"

Don became a vortex of celestial power and drove his fist into

Dark Don's gut. A shockwave blasted outward, flattening the forest for a hundred feet.

Dark Don staggered, blood dripping from his mouth. He summoned a lunar shield—

But Don shattered it instantly.

"SINGULAR DROPKICK!"

The kick rocketed Dark Don across the clearing. He rolled, gasping, and launched a desperate flurry—hook, hook, backhand, kick. Don weaved around each strike with unnatural fluidity.

Celestial chains burst into existence behind Don. He anchored himself, pulling back like a loaded slingshot.

"150% INCREASE—OVERRIDING KICK!"

He shot forward in a blur. His foot collided with Dark Don's face, the impact shattering the air itself.

The final shockwave leveled what remained of the forest, carving a crater into the earth.

At its center, Dark Don knelt—dazed, bleeding, barely conscious.

Don walked past him without a glance.

"Rufty Mountains," he murmured, voice hollow. "Then Celestia will tumble."

A spiral of darkness peeled open beside him.

Incarceration stepped through.

Calm. Composed.

Watching.

"You're getting efficient," he said, a faint smile pulling at his face. "Breaking symbols is always the fastest way to break a world."

Don didn't respond.

Incarceration's eyes flicked toward the fallen Dark Don—then

back.

"Finish him," he suggested casually. "Or better yet... save it. There's a bigger message to send."

Don's gaze stayed forward. "After I raze Celestia, then no one will doubt me again."

Incarceration chuckled under his breath, "Good, because doubt is exactly what we're killing."

He stepped closer, voice lowering—more deliberate now, "Listen carefully, Celestia is a shield. As long as the Celestianites stand, Avangard believes it's safe."

His expression darkened, "So we remove it."

Don's eyes shifted slightly—but he didn't interrupt.

"We destroy Celestia," Incarceration continued, "and wipe out every Celestianite we can reach. Not for territory."

His smile sharpened.

"For fear."

The storm seemed to lean in.

"Because once they fall... every other tribe realizes the truth."

His voice dropped to a whisper.

"They were never safe to begin with."

A beat.

"And while the world panics..."

He raised a hand.

Dark energy flickered—forming a distorted image in the air: towering structures, glowing with unstable power.

"The Celestial Pillars, they were built to stabilize the Power Gems."

His fingers curled slightly.

"I'm going to corrupt them."

The image twisted—warping into something wrong, "They won't stabilize anything anymore, they'll produce—Fake Lu-

naranites and worse."

His grin widened, "Alien Uragas. Engineered predators. Weapons that only destroy."

The illusion collapsed.

Incarceration looked back at Don, "An army that doesn't need loyalty. Not even belief. Just orders."

Rain poured harder.

"And the Power Gems?" he added, almost amused. "They're influence, the gems can be corrupted."

Don finally turned slightly.

Incarceration met his gaze, "And when they are... they change you."

"DON!"

The shout ripped through the clearing.

At the treeline, the crew stood, soaked, tense, weapons ready but unraised. Their eyes locked onto him—searching for anything familiar.

They didn't find it.

Javier stepped forward awkwardly, raising his hands.

"Don... we don't wanna fight you. Maybe if you come home we'll, uh... give you free blueberries?"

Silence.

Even the rain seemed confused.

Javier shrugged. "Had to try."

Incarceration didn't look at them, "Dispatch."

The forest erupted.

The Illegals surged forward in beast form—Ironz, Azure, King, Rusty, Darn, Vironos—cutting through the storm like weapons unleashed.

The crew shifted instantly.

Don didn't move.

Didn't react.

He simply turned his back.

Incarceration faded into the darkness again—watching, always watching.

"I'll get him!" Power shouted, lightning sparking as he shot forward into the storm.

Scourge Don's voice echoed faintly behind him.

"Good-bye."

⊗ #1.20 — The Scorchings ⊗

The young Pre-Heroes were surrounded—Illegals on all sides, their shadows stretching across the broken forest floor. Vironos growled, steam curling from his nostrils, while Dark Olsen roared from somewhere above the trees.

Prince glanced around, sparks skittering across his feathers. "Okay, yeah, this is cute. Big baddies cornering us. Anybody got a plan before we die ugly?"

Before anyone could answer—the air warped.

Green light spiraled downward like a falling star.

Eli dropped from the sky, boots hitting the ground with a thunderous *thoom* that made the dirt ripple in slow motion, like time itself hesitated around him.

He rose from the crater he'd made, shoulders squared, eyes locked on Vironos.

Everyone froze.

Energy snaked across his body—bright green currents wrapping around his legs, threading up his spine, and pooling into his right arm. His hair lifted gently, tugged by temporal winds no one else could feel.

Olsen, barely standing, choked out, "I thought... you left at the ridge...?"

Eli didn't respond. Didn't even blink.

Chronos energy flared around him, the air bending and humming like reality was a taut string stretched over fire.

He finally looked back at the group.

And he explained everything—without a single word.

A flick of two fingers.

A sweeping motion of the arm.

A sharp tap to his own chest, then a point toward the forest.

It wasn't random.

They understood instantly.

Get moving.

We're out of time.

I came back because the future I saw ends with you dead if I leave this fight.

William blinked. "Uh... Javier? Was that English?"

Javier shrugged. "That was doomsday charades. I think he means 'run.'"

Sophia turned. The forest behind them was swallowed in fog—no Power, no backup, no leader. Just them.

She clenched her fists. "He's saying we move. I can see through the fog—follow me!"

She sprinted, leading half the group away, leaving Olsen, Prince, Demaurion, Archie, Ella...

...and Eli, now standing alone between them and the Illegals.

Ella looked at Olsen, panicked.

"Olsen, you're not okay. You can't—"

"I'm fine," he growled, forcing rock armor to coil around his legs. "Rock fixes everything."

The Illegals morphed into their beast forms. The heroes shifted too, snarling as the forest trembled beneath them.

Eli's body erupted in pale green radiance.

He transformed—

a Time Wyvern, scales dark green and hexagonal, wings etched with shifting runes that pulsed like living clocks.

He crawled toward Vironos.

Vironos lumbered forward.

They paused—muzzles inches apart—growling low.

Eli's wings snapped open.

A ripple of distorted reality flashed across the battlefield.

Battle began.

Vironos lunged—

but Eli flickered, reappearing behind him with a slash that landed three times before the first hit even registered.

Temporal echoes.

Afterimages striking out of sync with time.

Below them, chaos erupted—

Ella on Rusty's back, claws tearing.

Olsen crushing Dark Olsen's armor with primal force.

Prince and King exploding through the sky in a hurricane of lightning.

The battle roared.

But Eli?

He fought like the world was a chessboard he'd already solved.

Vironos snapped his jaws—

Eli rewound his position a foot to the left.

Vironos clawed—

Eli warped time, forcing the attack to crawl in slow-motion.

He struck with green energy spikes, each hit creating little shockwaves of collapsing seconds.

For a moment—just a moment—the Illegals hesitated.

Because Eli wasn't fighting to win.

He was fighting to buy the crew the exact amount of time they

needed.

Exactly what he saw.

Exactly what he returned to fix.

Power's Search for Incarceration

Rain tore down from the sky, hammering Power's skin, soaking his body, blinding him with cold. The forest blurred around him as he tore through it at lightspeed—branches whipping past, thorns scratching, mud splashing. Thunder shook the ground beneath his feet, lightning splitting the sky, and every inhale tasted like ozone and earth.

Then—

Crack.

A stick snapped underfoot.

Power skidded to a stop. Heart thudding. Rain slapping his face. He turned.

There.

Between jagged, towering trees—alone, unmoving, drenched like he'd been standing there long before the storm even started—stood Incarceration.

Not waiting.

Just... there.

Like he didn't belong anywhere else.

"INCARCERATION!" Power yelled, voice cutting through the rain, raw and desperate.

Incarceration's head tilted slowly. Red eyes glowed faintly through the storm, dull—tired more than anything—as they met his.

"You had something to do with this... didn't you?" Power's

fists shook, his body tense.

Incarceration didn't answer right away.

He crossed his arms, shoulders slightly hunched—not confident. Closed off.

"Maybe I did. Maybe I didn't."

A pause.

"...But everything's in check."

"IN CHECK?" Power's voice cracked, his chest heaving. "You broke him! Don! You twisted him until he didn't even know himself!"

Thunder ripped across the sky.

Power stepped forward, boots slipping in mud. "We want the real Don back! Not whatever you forced out of him!"

Incarceration exhaled slowly, tilting his head back, letting the rain hit his face.

"You know..." he muttered, voice quieter now. "You were the golden Zenith."

Power blinked, thrown off.

"The one everyone talked about. The one everyone looked up to."

His voice didn't rise.

It sank.

"And the rest of us?"

Power didn't respond.

Incarceration gave a small, empty laugh.

"Actually—no. Not 'us.'"

He looked back at Power.

"Just me."

The rain hit harder, like the sky was leaning in.

"I wasn't like them," Incarceration continued. "I didn't shine. I didn't inspire. I didn't fit."

His fingers twitched at his sides.

"My Element? Nightmare."

The word sat heavy in the air.

"My appearance? Something people avoided looking at too long."

Another step forward.

"And the Zeniths?"

His voice cracked slightly.

"They didn't hate me."

A pause.

"...That would've meant they noticed me."

Power's expression shifted.

Incarceration's eyes dimmed.

"They just... didn't care."

Lightning flashed.

"Meetings would end without me being spoken to. Missions would happen without me being called."

His jaw tightened.

"I stood in the same room as you all... and still felt like I wasn't even there."

Power's chest tightened.

"You—"

"Even you," Incarceration cut in, voice sharp now. "You saw me."

A beat.

"And still did nothing."

Power froze.

"I thought you were different," Incarceration said, quieter again. "I thought if anyone would notice... it'd be you."

Rain slid down his face, mixing with something heavier.

"But you didn't."

He clenched his fists.

"No one did."

The storm roared.

"I wasn't a Zenith," he said. "Not really."

His voice dropped into something hollow.

"I was just... something standing next to them."

Power's voice came out strained. "I didn't know—"

"That's the point," Incarceration snapped.

Silence hit for a split second.

Then—

"I made Don suffer," he said, quieter now. "Because I needed someone to feel it."

His gaze flickered.

"To feel what it's like to exist... and still not matter."

Power took a step forward, shaking. "You don't have to stay like this. You don't have to be alone. We can fix this—together."

Incarceration's head lifted slowly.

For a second—just one—something broke through.

One eye widened. The glow flickered. Cracks spiderwebbed faintly across it.

And underneath all of it—

There he was.

Not a villain.

Not a monster.

Just a kid who was never seen.

And then—

BAM.

Incarceration slammed his fist into Power's jaw, sending him rocketing into the air.

Branches shredded around him. Rain stung like needles. Power's vision blurred, spinning, crashing into mud, coughing,

struggling to rise.

Incarceration didn't give him a second to recover. Teleport, gut punch, uppercut—

A black shockwave tore through the forest. Trees cracked and splintered like twigs.

Power spiraled. He was airborne again. Mid-fall, Incarceration dropkicked him—CRSHK—Power blasted through rock, coughing, lungs burning.

He staggered to his feet. Incarceration was already there. The next clash hit him like an avalanche—fist against fist, bone-cracking, forest-shaking. Every strike, every dodge, every breath was survival and fury all at once.

Power's body screamed. He fell to mud, trembling, chest heaving. Incarceration's boot pressed down on him, holding him like the storm itself.

"Why would I need your help," Incarceration hissed, "when you never cared?"

"I DO care!" Power choked out, soaked, exhausted, shaking.

"You could've done better... brother," Incarceration said, voice low, cutting deeper than any punch.

Then he turned, pacing into the storm-dark trees. Power lay in mud, rain drenching him, heart hollowed by words heavier than steel.

"And Don's not coming back to you. Never," Incarceration's voice echoed, inside and out.

Something inside Power snapped.

Blue energy exploded from him. Wild. Ferocious. His eyes ignited like twin suns. Lightning tore the sky apart, fire in the clouds, rain hissing to steam.

Power stood. Rain evaporating off him in bursts. Storm wind thrashing. Every muscle coiled with fury he had never allowed

himself to feel.

He sprinted. Faster than the storm. Faster than fear.

Incarceration turned.

He realized, too late. He had underestimated him.

Power lunged, unstoppable. Energy rolling, lightning crackling, fury incarnate—

"OVERPOWERED... OVERHAND... PUNCH!!!"

BWAM.

The strike shattered everything—forest, air, silence. Incarceration flew upward like a dark missile, leaving a world-shattering shockwave behind.

Power's chest heaved, lungs burning. He looked up at the fractured sky and screamed through the storm:

"I'LL COME BACK, BROTHER!!!"

At King Dreadixz's Castle

King Dreadixz lounged on his throne like he owned the moon itself, talons tapping a lazy rhythm on the armrests. Same towering monster as always — but those eyes? Nah. Something was off. His right one carried a scorched red ring, still burned into the flesh from Archie's explosion back at Eclitsic. A permanent reminder he hates.

He whistled a low, villain-type tune... until—

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK.

The portcullis rattled like it feared him. Dreadixz didn't even flinch. Just sighed.

"Ugh... come in."

The gate groaned open. Two Lunaranite guards marched in, dragging two prisoners bound in heavy cuffs.

Dreadixz's jaw twitched. "Tell me, guards... who are these?"

The first prisoner: a Celestianite dragon girl — white scales shimmering like frost under moonlight, a purple spine glowing down her back, gold eyes sharp enough to cut glass. Indigo belly scales, dark purple curling horns, and a bright yellow snout. Her tail ended with a single yellow feather swaying defiantly.

The second prisoner: a Flamenite, black-scaled and carved with scars like battle graffiti. Red underbelly, red horns, teeth like execution tools. His fiery orange eyes carried a void-black ring inside them. He hissed and fought the guards like he'd rip both in half if he got one free movement.

"These two were caught sneaking into Foreshade, sir," the first guard said.

Dreadixz snorted. "What are these little wyrmlings doing in *my* kingdom?"

"They were searching for these," the other guard added, pulling out three Power Gems — red, blue, and green.

"Oho..." Dreadixz chuckled. "A gift. How thoughtful."

"Okay, now you got what you want!" the Celestianite barked. "Can we go?! It's late!"

The Flamenite snapped at a guard, enraged.

Dreadixz snapped his fingers. "Identify yourselves, wyrmlings."

"We're not wyrmlings!" she shot back. "Just let us go! Keep the stupid Gems!"

"Not until I know who you are," he growled.

She huffed, defeated. "Starla."

Dreadixz's grin widened. "Ah. The King's daughter. Half-expected, half didn't. So tell me — where's your mother?"

"In Zeriath," Starla said flatly. "Keeping a promise."

Dreadixz clapped once, mockingly. "So you're a stray. Daddy

dead. Mommy gone. No one left for you."

Starla's jaw clenched.

"And the Flamenite?" Dreadixz asked.

Starla glared. "His name is Scorch. He doesn't talk. He has a condition—he's stuck in his beast form."

Scorch snarled low, muscles tightening like something barely being held together.

Dreadixz chuckled. "He doesn't look very... civilized."

Then his expression dropped.

"You may release the Flamenite... but kill the Celestianite."

Starla snapped instantly. "ARE YOU SERIOUS?! LET ME GO, YOU PSYCHO!"

The guards hesitated for half a second—just enough.

Scorch's body began to shake. Not fear.

Rage.

The chains around him creaked—not snapping instantly, but straining under pressure. Heat built beneath his scales, faint at first... then rising.

The guards noticed.

"Hey—HEY—!"

Too late.

Scorch ripped one arm free, tearing metal out of the wall itself. The second cuff didn't last long after that.

Now the guards reacted properly.

They grabbed the Power Gems, energy sparking violently in their hands.

One launched forward with a charged strike—

Scorch ducked low and slammed into him like a missile, knocking the wind out of his chest and sending the Gem skidding across the floor.

The second guard fired a blast, Scorch took it.

It hit his side and actually burned, forcing a snarl out of him, but it only made the fire inside him spike harder.

He lunged.

This time, it wasn't clean or instant.

They struggled.

The guard tried to push him back with the Gem's energy, but Scorch forced through it, jaws clamping down with brutal force until the resistance gave out.

The second guard froze, then broke.

He bolted.

Not fighting. Not thinking. Just running.

Scorch didn't chase.

He turned instead, focused.

Starla.

He unleashed a controlled blast of flame at her restraints. The metal glowed, softened, then snapped apart.

She dropped free, grabbing one of the fallen Power Gems.

That's when the room shifted.

Dreadixz stood.

Slowly.

H was annoyed.

The air grew heavier as he stepped down from his throne, eyes locked onto them.

"You've made a mess," he muttered.

Then his body twisted, expanding, cracking, reshaping into his Lunaranite Dragon form. Massive. Dominant. The kind of presence that made the room feel too small.

He didn't hesitate.

He attacked.

Fast.

His claws slammed into the ground where Scorch had been a

split second earlier, stone exploding outward.

Scorch barely dodged.

Dreadixz's tail whipped around instantly.

This time, it clipped him, launching him across the room and into a pillar with a brutal crack.

He hit the ground hard.

Dreadixz advanced.

No wasted movement. No talking.

Kill intent.

Scorch forced himself up, limping—but when the tail came again...

He committed.

Instead of dodging, he bit down on it.

Dreadixz roared, fury snapping through the room.

Scorch's flames surged, far hotter than before, pushed by pain, adrenaline, and pure instinct. The heat burned deep into the tail, forcing Dreadixz to yank it back violently.

In that moment of recoil, Dreadixz lunged forward and tackled Scorch, slamming him into the ground and sinking his fangs into his shoulder.

Scorch roared, thrashing violently, but this was Dreadixz's territory now.

He was winning.

Starla moved.

She didn't hesitate.

She launched forward, Power Gem flaring in her hand, and drove her fangs into Dreadixz's neck, targeting a weak point—not brute force, but precision.

That forced him off.

He staggered back a step, blood running down his scales, eyes narrowing.

"...You two are more trouble than expected," he muttered.

Starla didn't waste the moment.

She grabbed the remaining Power Gems and backed toward Scorch. "We're leaving. Now."

Scorch pushed himself up, injured but moving.

Dreadixz didn't chase immediately, watching them run.

By the time he stepped forward again, they were already gone.

The throne room fell silent, broken only by the slow drip of blood onto stone.

Dreadixz exhaled sharply, tail twitching, gaze fixed on the shattered entrance.

"...Interesting."

Foreshade would remember this night.

Not as a victory.

But as the moment something dangerous slipped through his grasp.

⊗ #1.21 — Starla Meets the Broken One

⊗

Rain poured down in relentless sheets, lightning tearing across the sky as thunder shook the Rufty Mountains to their core. Water sluiced over jagged rocks, carving temporary rivers that vanished into the cracks. The moon fought through the clouds, a pale disc barely piercing the storm, while wind howled like a beast, and the sky screamed in violent arcs of light and sound.

Amid the chaos, Scourge Don stood. His talons dug into the jagged stone, black scarf whipping behind him. Dragon-sharp gloves glinted with dark celestial energy, violet eyes glowing as they drank in the storm. Each step made the rain hiss across his scaled body, droplets sliding off his crumpled metallic snout.

A guttural roar split the air. "RRRAAAHHHH!" Don's muscles tensed beneath the pounding rain. From the shadows, a massive figure emerged:

The Razor Drake.

Colossal, its scales jagged as stone, armored like the mountains themselves. Yellow eyes burned through the deluge, jagged horns curving back, tail lashing violently. Water streamed down its angular jaw, and a black insignia flashed across its forehead with every lightning strike. Its roar shook the peaks.

"RRRAAAHHHH! RRRRRAAAAARRRGH!"

Don adjusted his mask, talons flexing, wings unfurling. Dark celestial energy rippled across him, reflecting the storm's chaos. Daggers appeared in a blur, spinning with cosmic light.

"Beast of the Rufty Mountains... the Razor Drake," he muttered. "You'll live... for seconds."

He surged forward, a streak of black and violet. Daggers spun in lethal arcs as he leapt, diving at the creature. WHOOSH! The Drake twisted, slamming its tail into him. SMASH! Pain shot through him, but he recovered instantly, daggers twirling as he struck again. ZAAAP!

The Drake roared, jaws snapping. CRAAASH! KRAAACK! Don twisted midair, landing behind it. Daggers flew, metal clanging against scales. CLANG! SHHHINK! Timing his next move perfectly, he grabbed one dagger mid-flip, kicked off the slick rock, and slammed into the beast's flank. THUD! Sliding across rain-slick stone, daggers spun, crimson streaking across its armored body. SPLAT! SWOOSH!

Their clash became a ballet of claws, talons, steel, and cosmic light. Heads swung, tails whipped, wings beat, lightning split the sky. KRAAAANG! THOOM! CRUNCH! Don caught the Drake's snapping jaws between his daggers, teeth gritted behind his mask. ZZZAP!

Channeling dark celestial energy, he unleashed a devastating kick, flipping backward into a blaze of light. Dust, rain, and blood mingled as they skidded across the stones. BOOM! WHOOM! Don rose, daggers spinning, scarf soaked and trailing.

"If this is all you can do..." His voice cut through the storm. "...then you are a waste of my time."

In a blur, he teleported before the Drake, dagger plunging into its skull. SHING! KRAAK! ZZZAAAP! Lightning illuminated its

final shuddering roar. Blood oozed down its neck as it hit the ground. "RRRAAAHHHH!"

Rain washed over Don's tattered form, wings spread, mask glinting, daggers poised.

"Thank you..."

STARLA AND SCORCH

The dragons cut through a storm so violent it felt alive. Rain slashed sideways, lightning ripped the midnight sky open, and thunder rolled across the heavens like a war drum. The clouds above writhed in shifting grays, drowning the world in a waterfall of cold fury. Trees bent under the weight of the wind.

Mud swallowed the forest floor.

Every raindrop hit like a warning.

High above, Starla and Scorch carved through the chaos, wings beating against the storm's wrath. Flashes of lightning lit their scales in shards of white and violet as they fled—fast, desperate. After the last attack, they both knew one thing:

Dreadixz would not let them get away.

Not for long.

Starla's ears twitched. She peered down through the sheets of rain. "Forest," she called, raising her voice over the thunder. "We disappear there."

No debate. They dove.

The wind clawed at their wings as they ripped through the treetops, crashing into the drenched underbrush. Mud splattered. Branches snapped. Shadows swallowed them whole.

"I think we're clear," Starla murmured, scanning the storm-dark forest. "I'm shifting."

Her body erupted into a soft white glow, the beast form dissolving into something smaller, more human, more vulner-

able. Wings folded tight against her back. Her curled horns gleamed beneath blond hair streaked with indigo. Her tail flicked nervously. But the biggest change—

Her eyes.

Once golden.

Now a piercing, icy sky-blue.

Scorch eyed her, silently asking the question neither of them wanted to voice: *What now?*

Starla adjusted her jacket and stepped forward, slow, cautious—

Then she froze.

"You hear that?" she whispered.

A guttural scream echoed through the trees.

Something that didn't belong here.

Scorch stepped in front of her, fire flickering in his throat. His growl vibrated the ground beneath them.

The scream came again. Closer.

Without speaking, they pushed forward, forcing their way through drenched leaves until the forest opened into the Rufty Mountains.

Titanic stone pillars towered over them, jagged cliffs stabbing into the storming sky. The canyon floor below was a graveyard of shattered rocks and torn plants, wind spiraling through it like a ghost.

The scream ripped through the mountains once more—much closer.

They sprinted toward the sound—

Thwip!

A dagger tore through the air toward them.

Scorch lunged, snatching the blade between his teeth, spitting it onto the mud with a metallic clatter. Both stared at it—double-

edged steel, glowing with violent violet energy.

Blood stained the handle.

Old. Dried.

Not much.

Whoever used it didn't need weapons.

Starla looked up—

and her breath left her.

At the base of the mountain lay a Drake. A beast of legend. A titan of Rufty Mountain—

dead.

Its stone-like scales were cracked open like shattered armor. Its tail lay curled, unmoving. The dagger embedded deep in its skull pulsed with faint celestial light. A spear of earth jutted through its throat, planted into the ground like a grave marker.

Starla stumbled back, hands over her mouth. "W-We need to leave," she whispered. Even at twelve, this was too much. Far too much.

Snap.

Dark indigo chains burst from the air and wrapped around their bodies, yanking both dragons upward. They thrashed, suspended midair as celestial bindings constricted around their limbs.

Scorch roared, fire erupting wildly. The chains held tight.

someone fell from the sky.

A figure slammed into the mud with a heavy thud, rain splashing off his broken armor.

Starla twisted to see him clearly—

and her heart dropped.

He wore a once-heroic suit now torn to ribbons, soaked in rain, dirt, and dried blood. His dragon-like mask was cracked, barely hanging on. Blood dripped from beneath it, trailing from

a wound near his right eye.

His left eye burned with purple celestial fire.

His wings—

one missing entirely,

the other dragging behind him in tatters.

A shredded violet cape clung to his shoulders. His gloves were ripped to claw-like shreds. His shoes looked half-destroyed.

"HEY!" Starla shouted, struggling against the restraints.

The figure lifted his head slightly. He tilted it. Then—snap. The chains vanished. Starla and Scorch hit the mud hard, gasping. Scorch stepped forward, flames lighting his throat again, but Starla threw an arm out, stopping him. Her eyes locked onto the stranger. Something about him felt familiar. Wrongly familiar. Like a memory that existed only in nightmares.

"What's your name?" she asked softly. "Did you... kill that Drake?"

The Celestianite coughed, his voice low, worn, and empty.

"Don," he said.

A shadow passed over him. "But I guess I'll be Scourge Don forever..." He turned away, dragging himself through the mud, every step heavy, every breath sharp.

Before he vanished into the rain, he shot her a sideways glare—cold enough to pierce bone.

"Who do you claim to be?"

Starla steadied her voice. "Starla. Princess of Celestia. And you're Don, right? One of the Chosen Ones? I... I heard about you. Just not like this."

Don shrugged, not bothering to look back.

"Whatever." He kept walking. The darkness followed. Starla watched him disappear into the storm—and something unfamiliar twisted in her chest.

Curiosity.

Something else she couldn't name yet. Whoever Don used to be... this wasn't him.

Grolian Forest

In the Grolian Forest, thunder cracked across the sky, shaking the battlefield below. Claws tore through flesh. Metal screamed against metal. Roars and cries blended into the storm like a symphony of chaos.

Ella launched onto Rusty's back, claws digging deep into his hide as he bucked beneath her with a furious roar. Nearby, Olsen ripped into Dark Olsen's reinforced legs with pure primal aggression, teeth bared as sparks burst from every impact. Above them, the war spread into the heavens themselves.

Prince and Dark Prince—King—tore through the clouds like twin lightning strikes unleashed from the gods. Rain hammered against them as they zigzagged through the storm at impossible speed, their bodies flickering like living electricity. Prince's feathers blazed with raw current, while King dragged trails of magnetic lightning behind him, crackling like distorted blue comets.

King slowly rose from the shattered earth.

Magnetic electricity crawled around his body in violent spirals, distorting the rain around him as chunks of debris lifted off the ground piece by piece. His eyes locked onto Prince with cold intensity.

Then he spoke.

"Not bad."

He raised one hand.

The magnetic field around him exploded outward.

Bolts fired from his fingertips faster than bullets, ripping through the forest in glowing streaks. Prince barely reacted before the barrage engulfed him completely. Electricity wrapped around his body as King disappeared—

—and reappeared beside him instantly.

CRACK!

A punch to the ribs.

FLASH!

An elbow to the spine.

BOOM!

A kick to the jaw.

King moved with terrifying precision, every strike calculated, every movement efficient. No wasted motion. No emotion. Just relentless violence.

Prince crashed through a line of trees before skidding across the mud.

King descended slowly through the rain, magnetic force dragging rocks, broken branches, and twisted metal into orbit around him like satellites.

Prince spat blood onto the ground and smirked.

"Magnetic surge, huh? Do better."

The air suddenly changed.

Electricity erupted around Prince in spiraling currents, blue light flooding across his body as his energy climbed higher and higher. Lightning wrapped around him in tightening coils until the storm itself seemed to bend toward him.

FWOOOOOSH!

Prince exploded into pure electrical force.

His eyes burned bright, symbols glowing within them—a V in one eye, a P in the other. Energy crackled violently around his

fists as his entire body radiated power.

Voltron Prince had arrived.

"You know what's funny?" Prince grinned. "I was just starting to get bored."

King stared at him silently for a moment.

Then magnetic lightning erupted around his body.

The ground beneath him cracked apart as dark electricity spiraled higher and higher into the storm clouds.

"If you're done talking," King said coldly, "come prove it."

The two vanished instantly.

BOOOOOM!

Their collision detonated across the sky, shockwaves ripping through the clouds as lightning exploded in every direction.

The battle became absolute chaos.

Voltron and King tore through the storm at impossible speed, fists colliding hard enough to shake the forest below. Every clash sounded like thunder detonating overhead.

Voltron shot upward before diving back down, tendrils of lightning wrapping around King midair.

"50 THUNDEROUS SEASONS!"

He spun into a vortex of electricity and drove King straight into the ground.

The impact unleashed a massive eruption of blue-white energy that lit up the entire forest.

Before the smoke could clear, Voltron appeared beside the crater.

"VOLTRON'S PROMISE!"

A devastating uppercut launched King into the sky.

Voltron followed immediately.

A punch to the stomach shattered the air itself.

Then he vanished.

FLASH!

A strike from the left.

FLASH!

Another from above.

FLASH!

Another from behind.

Voltron attacked from every direction at once, moving like a living thunderstorm as King struggled to keep up with the overwhelming speed.

Then silence.

Voltron pulled back his fist.

"The Third Chosen One."

The punch landed.

Light consumed everything.

King slammed into the earth below, bleeding heavily as smoke rose from his body.

Voltron landed nearby with a grin.

"Ooh. I thought things were finally getting interesting."

King coughed, slowly forcing himself back to his feet. Blood dripped from his mouth as magnetic sparks flickered weakly around him.

But his expression never changed.

"You still talk too much," he muttered.CLANK.

A metallic sound echoed through the trees.

Everyone froze.

CLANK.

Prince turned slowly.

A figure emerged from the darkness beneath the rain-soaked canopy, bathed in a glowing violet aura.

A Zenith.

His body shimmered like a living silhouette, glowing eyes

locked directly onto Prince. In one hand floated all of the Power Gems. Wrapped around his arm was a futuristic steel watch pulsing with violet energy.

The figure smirked.

"Well," he said coolly, "if it isn't Avangard's favorite little heroes."

He glanced toward the Illegals.

"You guys can move on. I'll handle them."

Prince narrowed his eyes.

"Who the heck are you?!"

The figure tilted his head with a smug grin.

"Maybe you'll find out."

SNAP.

The moment his fingers clicked, eleven Lunaranites burst from the trees like living shadows.

The rain slowed to a drizzle.

But the sky remained black.

The crew instinctively backed together as the Lunaranites surrounded them from every angle, weapons drawn with terrifying precision.

The figure stood calmly in the center while a glowing violet orb floated above his palm, spinning rapidly with a low mechanical hum. Purple energy pulsed from it in waves, dancing between his fingers like it was alive.

Then he smiled.

Sharp teeth gleamed beneath the moonlight.

Everyone froze.

Olsen could barely stand upright anymore.

"Oh, awesome," he groaned. "Lunaranites everywhere. Exactly what I needed after getting folded by a metal brachiosaurus."

Archie pointed furiously.

"WHO EVEN ARE YOU?!"

The figure raised an eyebrow.

"Hm. You're thinking about running."

The crew stiffened.

Because he was right.

Then his eyes shifted toward Olsen.

"And the Earth guy's thinking about eating rocks again."

Olsen's eyes widened.

"HEY! YOU CAN'T JUST READ MY MIND! THAT'S WEIRD!"

The figure shrugged carelessly.

"Oh well."

He clenched the orb tightly.

Immediately, the Power Gems lit up with dark violet energy and began levitating higher into the air.

Ella stepped forward in panic.

"What are you doing?! Leave them alone!"

Too late.

Purple chains exploded from the ground like striking serpents.

CLANG! CLANG! CLANG!

They wrapped around the crew instantly—arms, legs, torsos—locking them down before anyone could react.

Demaurion went feral.

The Leviathan roared from deep within his chest as he thrashed violently against the restraints, biting into the chains with glowing fangs.

Nothing happened.

The chains didn't even crack.

The figure laughed softly, "You're all hopeless."

He looked toward the Lunaranites, "Take them in, boys."

He glanced skyward.

"Power Gems... scatter."

The Gems shot upward like missiles before splitting apart across the clouds, vanishing into different directions like stars breaking apart across the night sky.

Prince's eyes widened.

"NO—NO! NOT THE POWER GEMS!"

Lunaranites descended from above moments later, landing around the crew with eerie silence, spears aimed directly at their hearts.

Eli said nothing.

He just kept pulling against the chains with silent fury burning in his eyes.

Then Vironos stepped forward, grinning.

"Thanks for your part. Finish the job. We're moving to Phase Two."

The Illegals disappeared into the forest.

BOOM.

Something massive landed nearby.

The ground shook beneath everyone's feet.

A towering shadow stepped through the mist.

The crew's faces drained of color.

"DREADIXZ!"

The name exploded from their mouths in unison.

He stood there with his wings folded behind him like a fallen god, towering over the battlefield with a monstrous grin stretched across his face.

"You know, Krane," Dreadixz said casually, glancing toward the orb-wielding figure, "there's a reason I hired you."

His grin widened.

"And you delivered."

Demaurion thrashed harder against the chains.

“LET US GO BEFORE I RIP YOUR HEAD OFF!”
Dreadixz raised a hand calmly.
“Relax.”
His voice dripped with amusement.
“We’re just taking you somewhere special.”
His eyes glowed beneath the storm clouds.
“A little place called... ‘Foreshade’.”

⊗ #1.22 — “Took long enough.” ⊗

Thunder tore open the sky, splitting the clouds like something angry was clawing its way out.

Through the rain and fog, Don barely saw shapes, but he heard everything.

The storm. The wind. His torn tail dragging across the ground like a blade through water.

He told himself he made the right choice.

If they’d cared, they would’ve understood.

Now? He figured being alone was easier. Easier to accept, easier to weaponize.

A metallic *clink* broke through the storm.

Don’s head snapped up.

A faint pink glow pulsed in the mud, a hexagonal gem humming like a heartbeat.

Another Power Gem.

His eyes lit with dark celestial current, the glow searing through the fog. He already felt its pull... just like the first one. The Incarceration Gem. The gem that had dragged every buried memory up and forced him to choke on them. The one that hollowed him out and turned him into what he was now:

Scourge Don.

Turning back wasn’t an option. He’d tried. The gem didn’t let

him.

He knelt, rain dripping off his mask, and reached for the gem.

A scorch of red-orange fire cut through the fog, aimed straight at his skull.

He moved without thinking, one fluid step and the blast detonated behind him.

Two figures emerged from the haze.

Krane.

And Overbrawl.

Krane's violet-flame eyes cut through the fog like a threat he didn't bother to hide. Overbrawl's arms folded over his chest, grin wide and cruel.

"Took us long enough," Overbrawl said, voice dripping cockiness.

Krane cracked his knuckles. "Relax. I just want answers... maybe a warm-up."

Don's voice dropped, sharp as a blade.

"Ask."

Krane tilted his head, grin lazy.

"Incarceration's location. You've got the black gem, you should know. Yes or no?"

"No."

Overbrawl snarled. "Don't play dumb with us—WHERE IS HE?!"

Don raised a brow, unbothered. "Why do *you* care?"

Krane shrugged. "We split them up."

Don scoffed. "Genius move. Why not just hide them? Splitting them is begging for a war."

Krane's smile darkened.

"We stole those crystallized rocks from you idiots. Dreadixz wanted them back, but I had... other plans. Scattered them

across Foreshade, Rufty Mountains, Scarletsville — anywhere Incarceration couldn't reach. Because if he gets his hands on them? Game over."

Don's jaw locked.

"Two ex-Zeniths on the run, saying they wanna kill Incarceration. Yeah. I'm definitely not trusting that."

Krane's eyes flicked, flames catching the wind.

"You don't have to trust me. But I'll be the one to take him down. Before he exposes something I'd rather stay buried."

"You're lying," Don growled.

Krane didn't blink. "Believe what you want."

Overbrawl stepped forward, chaotic energy crackling around him.

"You're wasting our time."

Krane's flames spiraled up his arms. "Agreed."

Don didn't even shift his stance.

Krane's eyes widened, watching the deep violet energy leisurely writhing from Don's body.

Power Gem energy. That automatically means that he could be near our level in terms of strength and power. Especially when the Incarceration Gem is in use, it tells me that he's almost as powerful as Incarceration himself.

"Overbrawl," Krane murmured, cracking his fists. "He's gonna be a challenge."

"What nonsense are you spouting?" ranted Overbrawl. "WE'RE EX-ZENITHS. WE'RE STRONGER."

"No, Overbrawl," retorted Krane, shifting his deep gaze toward Overbrawl. "You don't understand. This guy is using a Power Gem transformation that intensifies his strength and everything, making him almost as powerful as a normal Zenith is..."

Soon after, Overbrawl's attitude switched, gradually turning his head to Krane.

"...So he's using the Incarceration Gem... meaning—"

Krane lamented, shaking his head. "Yes, we're gonna have a rough time."

Scourge Don moved, flickering near Krane, fists risen and buzzing with celestial energy.

"*Focus Smash*," he whispered.

He moved in a blur of motion.

Don was in the air, his foot driven against Krane's cheek, lightning shrieked in the background.

BOOM!

Air blasted right after, and Don hit the ground, splashing the water with his torn shoes.

Chaotic energy snapped around Overbrawl, fueled by anger and resentment towards Don already. His body twitched in the rain as he and Don stood across the land.

"You—" he paused, trying to grab his words. He squinted his eyes, gritted his teeth, then snapped, "YOU BASTARD!!!"

Overbrawl rocketed across the battlefield, feet banging against the ground, resulting in multiple splashes.

He cocked his fist back mid-run, ready to uppercut.

It swung, smashing Don's chin as he was hurled into the sky from the wind, detonating into a spiraling wave of impact.

His body was obscured in the heavy storm showers. Lightning flashed, and his silhouette was seen.

He dropped onto the land, one hand on the ground and the other fist behind his body—cape moving silently in the thunderstorm.

Blood dropped from his bruised chin, exposed through the dragon mask. His tone was dry, "What a powerful hit, expected

that from a former Zenith like you."

He vanished and suddenly appeared near Overbrawl's flank, his energy snapping to life, "Yet you're too slow to catch me off-guard—"

BAM!

The force of the hit blew up through the wind currents. Krane double-legged dropkicked Don in the face.

Don's body flew across the battlefield like a rag doll, bouncing and repetitively slamming into the ground, leaving a wide distance between the duo and him.

Krane adjusted to his stance, blood slowly falling from his nose—throwing his purple fists up, "Lock in, brother. This kid is gonna be an insane threat to us."

"YEAH, I ALREADY HEARD YOU!" yelled Overbrawl, preparing himself too.

Cape moving in the wind, Scourge Don rose up—blood leaving his mask through rough tears.

"Teamwork isn't pointless... it just doesn't work at certain times..."

BOOOSH!

He flickered away, violet light warping between Krane and Overbrawl.

The two turned. Energy ignited from Don's sockets.

They jumped him.

Both Krane and Overbrawl barraged a relentless hail of blows in perfect sync while the camera vibrated to the attacks.

Don stood still, arms moving in rapid, speed frames, deflecting the millisecond flurries being hurled at him.

Scourge Don grabbed Krane's arm, spun, and slammed him into Overbrawl, launching them across the battlefield.

He turns his body while skidding back, feet pushing into

the dirt as the corrupted energy eyes flash and glow with dark celestial light, one palm against the ground and the other behind him.

"6.2% SORROW RUSH!"

BOOM!

The environment trembled.

His legs moved in a fuzzy hypersonic motion, dragging his hand across the ground to get a hold of himself, shredding the land beneath him.

FWOOSH!

Don appeared behind Krane.

BAM!

His leg sliced the air.

BASHK!!

Blood shot out of Krane's mouth in the rain as Don's ankle pressed deep into his neck.

Wind blasted him.

Don hit the ground.

Spun towards Overbrawl in a grunt.

WHAM!

Overbrawl backhanded Don's cheek, the camera moving visually slowly to show off the blood flying out of his nose—and his face scrunching from the arm.

Wind blasted him.

The environment moved quicker than him. He deliberately skipped from side to side, land bursting with each step.

Krane managed to teleport near Overbrawl, bleeding just as hard as he is, huffing and puffing.

"Damn.... this guy's—*huff*—too strong," Overbrawl spoke between breaths, *He used quick and offensive attacks, speeding past us and then throwing a hit for maximum impact. Something*

that Speed would do very often. He was even strong enough to make us bleed mid-battle. Krane looks pretty beat already.

Krane's watered teeth gnashed, *He's abusing speed, giving us surprise attacks, and immediately reacting once we fire at him. These were close-ranged attacks, even hitting us with far-ranged attacks. The only way that we could actually get a hit on him is if he loses us.*

Krane turned to Overbrawl, grinning, *I hope he knows the plan. Running and separating from each other could work. Using the mountains as a spot for one of us to attack will distract him. Meanwhile, there will be someone who stays on the ground and deals with him as well.*

Overbrawl turned to Krane, *This plan might be ass, but if it is what it is... then I'm gonna have to follow it. Alright, brother, let's do this.*

The world shook as the two of them vanished.

Don's body lifted.

"Strange... where did those two—"

FLASH!

Overbrawl flickered behind him in slow motion with chaotic energy crackling around his fists.

Don sighed.

Of course.

Don flashed away and hit the ground near Overbrawl, energy radiating and crackling as both of the sockets from his dragon mask flashed with dark celestial energy.

"WHERE IS THE OTHER ONE?!"

FWISH!

He blinked in front of Overbrawl, leg inches from him.

Overbrawl grabbed his leg, heaved him over, and striking his body with the surface.

He lifted him up from the ground and hurled him over the flooded land that almost seemed like a flat ocean.

Water sloshed as soon as his feet hit the ground.

He crackled with energy, launching into breakneck speed.

He sped across the battlefield at hypersonic velocities, the water sprayed rapidly behind him, glistening against the showering rain and the moon that peeked through the ominous clouds.

Overbrawl hurled blasts of chaotic energy at him.

Don moved, sprang, weaved, and spun through the orange volleys.

He leaped off the land and twisted, spiraling into the air as he darted toward Overbrawl, colliding into his crossed arms, causing a sonic boom to blast from behind.

Overbrawl stayed still while Scourge Don flipped back.

WHAT?!

He moved in slow motion midair, confused. Then he looked up.

A violet strike of lightning SLAMMED into him hard enough for the ground to tear apart and launch slabs of land into the sky in a chain of destruction.

Mountains collapsed and detonated from the impact as the air pressure exploded.

In the middle of the chaos, in slow motion, close up, while the slabs of land flew. Inside the maelstrom of spiritual energy was Krane, leg driven against Don's cheek and arms up while his eyes looked down, blazing with violet energy and spiritual fire.

Air pressure exploded once again as he flipped off Krane and crashed into the ground, shockwaves erupting across the battlefield.

He surged with energy and darted toward Don.

Don instantly flashed away and teleported into the sky.

He shot downward, dim light forging in his fists as the world blurred.

Krane twisted from below and unleashed blasts of spiritual energy that ripped through the storm.

Don fired back with dark Celestial blasts, the projectiles flattening into spinning disks as they tore across the sky.

The attacks collided.

Explosions rippled through the clouds.

Scourge Don slammed into the ground, knees bent, then snapped to the right—

BAM!!!!!

A fist crashed into the side of his head.

The impact blasted the air apart.

Don stumbled—

BAMMM!

Another strike buried itself into his midsection.

He folded forward and skidded backward across the fractured terrain.

Krane wasn't finished.

Spiritual energy crackled around him as he dashed side to side.

His movements blurred.

Flashing across Don's vision, he unleashed a barrage of strikes that landed from every angle.

Don staggered under the assault as bursts of energy detonated around him.

Then he looked up.

The sky was burning.

Hundreds of meteors tore through the cloud layer, painting the heavens in fiery orange.

Krane lowered his arm and—

BAM!

Drove a knee into Don's nose.

Don rocketed upward.

Clouds exploded apart as he tore through them.

He spun around, charging Celestial energy while meteors screamed across the atmosphere above.

His eyes widened.

Energy flashed.

"NOOO!"

A colossal meteor emerged from the storm.

Larger than the rest.

Wrapped in fire.

Behind it—

Hundreds more.

An entire meteor shower descending from the heavens.

The clouds vanished beneath the heat.

The sky became a sea of blazing orange streaks.

For a split second, everything seemed still.

Then—

KRAAAAAAASH!!!!

The colossal meteor slammed into Don.

An explosion of fire erupted around him.

The shockwave blasted through the surrounding meteors, dragging them into the inferno as they plunged toward the earth together.

The burning swarm ripped through the sky.

A storm of living destruction.

Hundreds of blazing trails carved across the heavens.

Faster.

Faster.

FASTER.

The colossal meteor drove Don into the flatlands of the Rufty Mountains.

The others followed.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!

The lead impact struck first.

A blinding orange flash consumed the horizon.

Then the rest arrived.

BOOM!

BOOM!

BOOM!

BOOM!

Meteor after meteor hammered the landscape in a chain reaction of devastation.

Gravity warped.

The atmosphere convulsed.

Mountains collapsed beneath the bombardment.

The earth folded and ruptured.

A colossal shockwave erupted from the impact zone, expanding across the continent as fire and debris swallowed everything in sight.

When the light finally overtook the battlefield, the flatlands of the Rufty Mountains were gone.

Krane and Overbrawl, observing from a distance, watched. Their eyes illuminated beneath the heavy downpour as the storm raged.

"Damn..." Krane whispered. "I think you did it too hard..."

"Eh," hastily said Overbrawl. "If he's down, he's down. Let him be."

The sounds of the rain pattering against the flat lands created ricocheting echoes over the combat zone.

"Y'know," Krane added as he stretched his crossed arms over

his head, "this guy already has the potential to fight us without even using the Power Gem itself."

Overbrawl stopped and lifted an eyebrow, growling at the words that just came out of Krane. "What are you trying to say...?"

Krane recognized Overbrawl's expression and put his arms down near his sides, his balled fists opening up. "He's stronger than before. Think about it. The way he fought us, his strategy. That is what kept him on his toes. If he were significantly weaker, then even with the Power Gem transformation, we would've beaten him already."

"Those words feel like jabs straight to the bones! It's pissing me off already, so don't even think about saying anything else that has something to do with the kid!"

A drop of sweat left Krane. "Yeah... don't talk about him any time soon, but we can't ignore him. I wonder if Power trained him or something, then that could be a reason."

A claw reached out of one of the thousand holes coming from the energized meteors that Overbrawl fired.

It pressed down on the level ground as smoke rose from the craters.

Emerging from the battlefield, Scourge Don trudged out of the crater—dirt falling off his ragged body as he stepped foot onto the flat lands while the rain descended from the dark heavens.

They both separated. That was their new plan. That was their strategy. They knew that I was using my speed to attack both of them at the same time, and how my reaction time is faster than ever due to this new transformation. But it's not like it's something that I could automatically master... what if there's something to this transformation that I don't even know about yet? Whatever, I just need a way to beat both of them once again.

It hit him. Energy crackled in his fists—his eyes lit up with the two letters—the two sigils—"K" and "X".

That's right, merging my KX Form with the Power Gem transformation. Power... as if he even matters anymore... did say that if I merge my transformation with a Power Gem transformation... it'll allow me to become more powerful than I ever was before. Forming a Zenith's power and my power will probably create something special, something that I've never witnessed before in my entire life...

His jaw clenched. He adjusted his mask underneath the showering rain.

"Right, I'm gonna finalize this."

The sound of a snapping hi-hat resonated across the battlefield.

The two whipped around, fronting Scourge Don as a drumming beat continued to play in the background, bobbing the ground.

Overbrawl froze, his face narrowing as he listened to the drums that came out of nowhere. "*What the*... where is that coming from?"

Krane listened too. The noises persisted, becoming louder—he tightened his eyes.

Don was jumping from side to side. Cosmic energy ignited with every step.

The beats switched, becoming more rapid. Something meant for dancing, but right now isn't time for dancing.

Krane's eyes widened.

No way... he's—

A singular tap from each step created shockwaves. The flatlands rumbled. His dark celestial energy became brighter, but dimmer. Expanding, huffing and puffing as he let the

lightning buzz.

Arcs surrounded him, jagged streaks of danger and light.

BUILDING UP ENERGY?!

Drums kept playing, but he stopped jumping.

The two watched.

Energy flared through the sockets in one letter on both eyes.

"K" and "X".

"KX: Engage..."

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!!!

Shady light tore out of his body, piercing into the air as a tremendous pillar of power.

The wind buckled, and the ground was staggering.

Only his silhouette could be seen through the beam of surging energy, and the two letters on both of his eyes, blinking at Overbrawl in Krane in a flicker of light.

Krane shrieked in his mind:

MERGING AN ELEMENTAL TRANSFORMATION WITH A POWER GEM TRANSFORMATION?!

Don snapped his fingers.

The beam swirled into nothing. The shockwaves stopped, and the wind stopped.

Floating over the craters as a silent celestial figure, but he was dimmer.

He had longer, spikier hair, his eyes were flowing with energy, blazing darkly as his body was consumed in the cosmic vessel. The sigils in his eyes, they burned like they meant something.

"Let's get this over with..."

FWISH!

Krane and Overbrawl stood still, instantly reacting as both of their energies crackled, standing side by side with each other.

That was until they heard the sky split. The two looked up.

Don was in the air, descending from above as a massive comet of cosmic destruction.

Krane stepped forward, spiritual energy reacting.

Overbrawl stood in front of Krane, his chaotic light sparking.

"HERE HE COMES!"

A guttural yell came from Don somewhere in the sky, mixing in with the thunder.

"152 PERCENT!!!!—"

Energy spiked through the roof in his body.

FWISH!

Had a kick readied behind him, moving in slow-motion near Overbrawl.

"SILENT KICK!!!"

BAM!

The ground peeled, and Overbrawl's body tumbled like a ragdoll across the flatlands.

Rocks skipped along the saturated stone. Overbrawl was sprawled against the ground.

He struggled to get up, shaking.

Blood dripped from his cheek, merging with the water with every *plop!*.

Don flashed past him.

Twisted mid-air.

Moved in slow motion mid-air, near him, with his leg stretched and locked behind him.

The leg smeared.

BWASH!

The orange Zenith tottered, blood fleeing from his mouth and nose.

Don hit the ground, spun, *BAM! BAM! BAM!*

Three twist kicks to the face.

He leaped, twirled into a vortex.

BAM!

Don's heel collided with the side of Overbrawl's face.

The chaos partner's head twisted, his feet splashed the water on the land.

He dropped.

"OVERBRAWL!" Krane yelled in the rain.

Lightning flashed, and Don stood near Overbrawl's body, aura sizzling and burning across his body as he stared into the eyes of the desperate Krane.

His celestial fire warped, "He's already down... give it a rest."

Krane's fists tightened as power climbed through his body in violent waves. The watch around his wrist glowed brighter and brighter until violet and orange flames spiraled around his arm like living serpents.

"YOU DARK BASTARD!!"

Fire swallowed him.

The rain hissed as droplets evaporated in the heat.

Then he was gone.

A ripple disturbed the storm behind Don.

Don turned.

BOOOOOOOM!!!

Their fists met.

The collision folded the rain outward in a perfect sphere. Clouds of mist rolled across the flatlands as the ground beneath them fractured into a web of cracks.

For a brief moment, neither moved.

Violet lightning crawled across Don's arm.

Orange fire danced around Krane's fist.

The two glared at one another through the storm.

Don slid backward, carving a shallow trench through the

soaked earth.

"Okay," he said, shaking out his hand. "Great start. Better than what Overbrawl did."

Krane's eyebrow twitched.

FWISH!

Both vanished.

The battlefield erupted.

A burst of orange fire exploded in the distance.

A streak of violet carved through the clouds.

Another collision rocked the mountains.

They appeared and disappeared across the landscape, trading blows between flashes of lightning.

A punch.

A counter.

A spinning kick.

An elbow.

Neither could gain ground.

The storm itself seemed unable to keep up with them.

Rain hung suspended in the air for split seconds before being scattered by the force of their exchanges.

Then they met head-on.

Backhand.

Punch.

Low kick.

Block.

Both twisted away at the same time before lunging forward again.

Their fists became streaks of color.

Orange.

Violet.

Orange.

Violet.

The sky flashed with every impact.

Don suddenly pivoted and swung a roundhouse kick toward Krane's head.

Krane caught it on his forearm.

His free hand shot forward.

BAM!

The punch landed squarely against Don's face.

Don was launched across the battlefield, skipping over the ground before flipping backward and blasting into the storm clouds overhead.

Rain battered Don as he ascended above the battlefield.

Far below, Krane stared upward.

Don stared back.

KRAAAK!!!

A bolt split the heavens, casting both warriors in stark white light.

Dark celestial power coiled around Don's arm, swallowing his fist in violet-black radiance.

The strike was ready.

But before he could bring it down—-"DON!"

He stopped.

That voice.

Great.

The glow around his arm dwindled away as he looked toward the source.

"I've got something to deal with..."

"DON! CAN YOU HEAR US?!"

The voice echoed across the battlefield.

Don remained still.

The storm howled around him. Rain drummed against his

armor and rolled from the edges of his wings. Beneath the mask, his jaw tightened.

Of course they were here.

Slowly, he turned.

Corrupted cosmic lightning flickered within the sockets of his visor.

Below him stood Class 101.

All of them.

Ryan.

Sophia.

Everyone.

Their clothes were soaked. Their faces carried the same expression.

Worry.

Concern.

Fear.

Not fear of him.

Fear for him.

For a brief moment, nobody spoke.

They simply stared.

The sight almost felt foreign.

A tired breath escaped through Don's nose.

He was exhausted.

Exhausted from fighting.

Exhausted from losing.

Exhausted from caring.

His wings spread and guided him downward through the rain.

As he descended, he reached up and removed the mask.

Several members of the class froze.

The scars running across his face were impossible to ignore.

Some had seen them before.

Others hadn't.

But none of them had ever seen him look this empty.

His violet eyes still glowed beneath the storm clouds, yet the fire that usually lived behind them felt distant.

Muted.

"This isn't the time."

His voice sounded lower than usual.

Not because he was trying to sound intimidating.

Because he was tired.

"Get out of here."

"No."

Ryan stepped forward immediately.

Water streamed down his mechanical armor while the orange core embedded within his chest cast a faint glow through the darkness.

"We're not leaving you."

Don looked at him.

Just looked.

The words felt hollow.

Not because Ryan didn't mean them.

Because Don no longer knew how to believe them.

"Isn't that what all of you did?"

The question hung in the air.

Nobody answered.

His gaze lowered.

"All those moments."

Rain slid down the scars on his face.

"Everything I tried to do."

His fingers curled.

"I failed."

The statement struck harder than any shout could have.

Sophia stepped forward.
The lights on her boombox pulsed softly against the darkness.
"Who said you failed?"
Don didn't answer.
"You fought the Hydra."
She pointed toward him.
"You survived King Gordiman's Bothole."
Another step.
"You protected people."
Another.
"You carried this team when nobody else could."
The rain continued to fall between them.
"We need you."
Her voice cracked slightly.
"You're our leader."
Don looked away.
"You're not worthless."
Something twisted in his chest.
For a second, he wanted to believe her.
That was the problem.
A bitter laugh escaped him.
Small.
Broken.
"I always screw things up."
The words barely rose above the storm.
"And every time I do, everything gets worse."
Lightning flickered beyond the mountains.
His voice weakened.
"I try to help."
Another pause.
"I try to do the right thing."

His throat tightened.
“And somehow it always ends the same.”
KRAAAK!!!
Lightning split the heavens.
White light flooded the battlefield.
Don squeezed his eyes shut.
The thunder rolled through the mountains.
When he opened them again, the anger was gone.
Only hurt remained.
“What happened between us…”
He swallowed.
“It’s not something I can forgive.”
Nobody moved.
Nobody interrupted.
Even the battlefield felt quieter.
Don descended the rest of the way and landed among them.
His boots touched the soaked ground with a soft splash.
For a few seconds, he simply stood there.
Close enough to reach.
Far enough to feel distant.
Then he lifted the mask and slid it back over his face.
The violet glow returned to the empty sockets.
“Coming back to me…”
His voice remained calm.
“When I tried to come back to all of you.”
Silence.
A bitter chuckle escaped him.
“How ironic.”
He turned away.
His cape shifted with the wind.
“One thing changed.”

He began walking.
Slow.
Deliberate.
Certain.
"I learned how to keep moving without any of you."
The class stood frozen behind him.
Unable to find the right words.
Unable to stop him.
Don didn't look back.
Not once.
"Turns out it's easier."

⊗ #1.23 — Free Will ⊗

Thunder ripped the sky open.

Rain attacked, slashing sideways, soaking the ground until it turned slick and hostile. Don stood across from Class 101, unmoving. Water streamed from his mask in steady lines, like something leaking that couldn't be sealed anymore.

No one spoke at first.

Mason finally stepped forward, hands shaking, forcing his voice into something brave.

"Don... come back. I know it feels impossible, but we can fix this. We're—"

"WHAT'S TOGETHER?" Don roared.

The word cracked louder than the thunder.

He took a step forward. Then another.

"If everything that broke me wasn't even my choice—" his voice dropped, trembling with fury, "—if you were the first ones to pull me apart while smiling and calling it help—what exactly are we 'together' in?"

Rain hammered the silence.

Faces tightened. Confusion. Guilt. No answers.

William frowned, desperate for logic. "What do you mean it wasn't your fault?"

Don laughed.

It was sharp. Ugly. Wrong.

"You really don't hear it," he said. "You never did."

Ryan's shoulders locked, gears grinding like he'd already decided. "Sorry, man," he muttered. "We're not letting you walk away."

Scourge Don flexed his clawed gloves. "Ryan," he said quietly, "don't."

Lonnie Mae's vines crept out of the mud, trembling. "We don't want to hurt you."

Kwa'asja's glow dimmed, rain streaking down her face. "And we're gonna regret it if we do."

Don looked at her.

Then past her.

"And that," he said, voice hollow, "is why this keeps happening."

He stepped forward. Dark celestial energy bled out of him, rippling with the storm like the sky itself was recoiling.

"Now that I'm a Chosen One," Don said slowly.

"Now that I'm broken—"

His eyes lifted.

"—let's see if you'll laugh now."

Something snapped in the air.

Ryan broke formation. "JUST LEAVE THE PHASE!"

He launched—fast, desperate—swinging for Don's jaw.

Don didn't dodge.

He caught Ryan mid-air.

Claws drove straight through his chest.

Blood sprayed hot against the rain.

Don slammed him into the ground so hard the earth split beneath them.

Ryan screamed. Then choked.

Everyone froze.

Sophia stared, shaking. "You— you just—"

Don turned toward them.

"You wanted force," he said. "This is force."

They powered up all at once—panic dressed as resolve.

Rain screamed louder.

"Oh," Don muttered, celestial light flaring violently, "this is gonna be heavenly."

They rushed him.

William dove first, wind howling—

Don met him mid-air and drove a celestial strike straight into his stomach, slamming him into the ground like a meteor.

Sophia fired sound-blasts—

Don blurred sideways, ignited in dark flame, and blitzed her. One punch. She folded.

Javier swung—

Duck. Counter. Uppercut. Gone.

Anhia dropped hail—

Teleport. Kick. She crashed into the dirt like discarded gear.

Mason rolled in, shouting his name—

Don appeared behind him and launched him across the field without looking.

Daysni. Lonnie. Emely. Jocabed.

Don didn't fight them.

He **cleared** them.

Emely froze the field—

Chains snapped out instantly.

Jocabed fired beams—

Don hurled Emely into them. Ice shattered. Screams followed.

Lonnie's vines—

Flash-kick. Skyward. Out.

Drake charged—

Mud blasts missed as Don danced through them, grabbed him, and blasted him across the mountains.

"Hmph," Don said coldly. "That it?"

"NOT EVEN CLOSE!"

Keyler zipped in, spider-thread wrapping Don mid-air, spinning around him violently.

A kick landed clean on Don's jaw.

For half a second—hope sparked.

Then Don snarled.

Celestial chains fired.

Keyler was bound instantly—

—and slammed straight into Kwa'asja like a living projectile.

A portal ripped open above.

Angel dropped through—aimed.

Redirected mid-air. Kicked. Fired a portal-spear—

It pinned Don's shoulder.

For one breath, Don froze.

Then he ripped it out.

Angel teleported to flank—

Don predicted it.

He teleported first.

One punch shattered Angel's trajectory, sending him spiraling into the clouds.

Bodies hit the ground.

Mountains cracked.

Don lifted Drake again, juggling him mid-air with brutal precision, then summoned colossal fists from the sky that smashed down like divine punishment.

Smoke swallowed the battlefield.

Fedjina was still standing—barely.

Don impaled her with a chain and dropped her without a word.

He scanned the wreckage.

Krane wasn't there.

Overbrawl wasn't either.

BOOM.

A fire-coated fist smashed across Don's face, sending him skidding through stone.

Krane stood in the smoke, flames crawling up his arm.

"Bye-bye," he smirked.

The watch bloomed open.

A purple orb expanded—screaming with spiritual energy. A miniature moon of annihilation.

Don froze.

The black hole.

The silence.

The laughter afterward.

"I..." he whispered. "I've seen this before..."

The orb swallowed him.

Gone.

Krane snapped his watch shut like he'd finished a chore.

Overbrawl limped up beside him. "Uh... boss?"

Krane's eyes glowed violet.

"Scarletsville."

At Lunaranite Prison

"Oooookay, can you actually snag that?" Olsen asked, nodding toward the rec hall mosaic—right in the center, Queen Stellar's painted eye had a tiny, wicked sparkle where someone had sunk a gem into the grout.

Archie cracked his knuckles, flames licking up his palms like he'd dipped them in pocket-sized suns. He grabbed the bars, heat crawling up the metal until it turned soft and glossy. The metal sighed and sagged, then gave. Archie squeezed through the gap like it was nothing, snaked across the room, and plucked the little jewel from the queen's eye.

Everyone stared—then absolutely lost it. "YOU COULD'VE DONE THAT THE ENTIRE TIME?!" Demaurion bellowed.

Archie flipped the gem between two fingers and shrugged, all chill. "I mean, I wanted to admire the statue vibe for a sec. It's aesthetic."

The others blinked toward the statue out of habit, then back at Archie as if he'd levitated the gem with jazz hands.

"Hmph, sounds reasonable enough."

"Great excuse."

"I'd do the same thing."

"He has a point."

Ella just gave them a look that could end wars. "WE'RE TRYING TO ESCAPE HERE! NOT STARE AT SOME SORT OF STATUE OF QUEEN STELLAR'S REAR E—nevermind..."

Everyone slowly walked out of the prison room with the silver Power Gem, and now they were free.

They looked around the dark and eerie place to see if anyone was there.

Luckily, there was nobody.

The place was dimly lit, cobwebs covered the ceilings, and dust drifted through the air. The sounds of prisoners yawning, some screaming in pain, and others crying filled the atmosphere.

Ella led the group as they followed her straight toward the black exit door. Archie also took the statue with him before following.

They moved through the door, sprinting silently, then stopped after a few minutes. Olsen slowly pressed himself against the wall while Prince peeked out of the exit door. He scanned the area, noticing that they were upstairs in the Storage Room. Prince peered over the edge, looking down at the ground.

He saw two Lunaranite guards in dragon form, holding their spears.

Prince smirked. "A piece of electric cake."

The others turned in Prince's direction, taking a peek before slowly stepping out. Just as Prince was about to snipe an electric spark at one of the guards, Ella grabbed his arm and told him to stop. One of the guards started speaking, and the crew listened carefully. "Go release Duke," one of the guards said, pointing his spear at the other.

"He's gonna be released for now because he's going to have a meeting with the king." Everyone started panicking silently, but Ella calmed them down—she had an idea.

As the guard walked up the stairs toward the prison room, the four clung to the ceiling, holding on so they wouldn't fall. The guard passed beneath them, entering the prison halls. Everyone sighed in relief, then quietly dropped to the ground.

Prince peered back down the stairs, and the other guard was gone. The four rushed downstairs, finding themselves standing on a red carpet with golden patterns. The walls were black and purple, and the lights were dim.

Barrels were stacked in the corners, and an arched entrance stood a few feet ahead of them. This led to a wide room with a stone battlefield in the center. Red banners hung from the walls, and a large throne sat to the right, connected by a circular bridge with many chairs around it. "That must be the Battle Room," Olsen whispered as he glanced through the entrance.

They quietly sprinted inside, making sure nobody was in sight. Taking out their weapons just in case, they began exploring.

Archie turned to the battlefield and eagerly ran toward it. He held the statue tight as he gazed at the floor, as if studying it. He whispered in awe, "This is amazing!"

"Archie! We're trying to get out of here, not scan the floor!" Ella murmured. Archie smirked as he put the statue down and looked around again. "It looks so cool!" The castle suddenly started shaking violently, as dust erupted from the roof.

Everyone slowly looked up and began backing away. Cracks formed above them—directly over Archie. The rocks were about to collapse, and Archie stood right on the battlefield, unaware.

Olsen dashed toward Archie, yelling, "ARCHIE, GET DOWN!" "Why should I?!" Archie whined. Olsen shouted as loud as he could, probably loud enough for the other Lunaranites to hear him.

"JUST GET DOWN—" Jagged rocks shot out from the ceiling, plummeting straight toward Archie's head. Olsen wasted no time. He leaped into the air like a superhero, his dark green ignited fists glowing as he cried out, "SPIKY GROUND!"

He hurled his fists at the falling debris, and large, jagged rocks shot up from the ground, completely shattering them into fragments. Landing right behind Archie, he huffed, "Next time, don't do anything stupid. How about that for once?" "Oh, come on, the battlefield looked cool," Archie said in a carefree voice.

"Survived? You kids are very lucky..." A deep, cold, sorrowful voice echoed from behind Archie and Olsen. Everyone froze for a second, then slowly turned to face the figure. He wore a mostly black and green-painted metallic suit, with a triangular emblem glowing green on his chest.

His armored legs were cybernetic, made of steel, patterned in black and neon green. A ripped black cape swayed behind him, tied to his neck. His eyes glowed an eerie green beneath a metallic helmet shaped like a bird's head, the beak also glowing neon green. The entire helmet concealed his mouth and face, except for his piercing eyes. He wore black gloves with glowing neon green lights. His fingers were sharp, and through his chest, a black heart with green outlines was visible, pulsing like a glowing shadow.

Demaurion asked, his voice filled with suspicion and caution, "Who... are you?"

⊗ #1.24 — Duke's Arrival ⊗

The Lunaranite soldiers closed in.

Boots scraped stone. Spears angled inward. Shields locked. A perfect circle.

Then the air *twitched*.

Olsen felt it first—cold sliding up his spine. Archie's flames sputtered. Duke's chest core flared neon green, bright enough to burn afterimages into the walls.

"Why," Duke growled, fists curling, electricity crawling up his arms, "won't you leave me alone?"

He slammed both fists down.

The floor exploded.

A shockwave ripped outward, snapping shields apart and hurling Lunaranites into the air like broken dolls. Bodies smashed into pillars. Armor rang like church bells. Neon fire licked up Duke's gauntlets, his heart-core hammering beneath his armor as lightning snapped vein to vein.

"GO ON," Duke roared, stepping through the smoke, "AND FINISH ME!"

They rushed him.

Big mistake.

Duke vanished.

He reappeared mid-stride—*gut punch*—one soldier folded,

launched skyward. Duke pivoted, *uppercut*—another slammed into the rafters, armor caving. Two charged from the left—

Duke spun.

A tornado kick detonated between them. Both bodies cartwheeled across the chamber, shattering a statue on impact.

Flash.

Kick.

Punch.

Duke streaked through the room like neon lightning, every strike precise, brutal. A heel smashed a face. A knee cracked ribs. A backhand sent a soldier skidding across the floor in a spray of sparks.

He dropped, palms flat—

BOOM.

White neon blasted outward. Walls ruptured. Stone peeled away. Debris rained down like shrapnel.

Silence.

Dust drifted.

Olsen groaned, pushing himself up. The chamber was wrecked—soldiers scattered, broken, impaled against walls. Duke stood alone at the center, neon fire rolling off his arms in waves.

Archie's fists ignited. "He's fast," he muttered. "Like—*not fair* fast."

Ella narrowed her eyes. "No beast traits. No mutation. That's tech."

Duke blinked.

He was suddenly in front of Archie.

A fist buried itself in Archie's gut—*CRACK*—and Archie rocketed backward, smashing straight through the throne behind him.

Ella lunged.

Duke sidestepped and *hooked* her mid-swing. She spun through the air and hit the floor hard.

Olsen charged.

Duke vanished.

Hands seized Prince mid-air—*slam*—and Prince disappeared through the ceiling in a burst of rubble.

Fireballs screamed toward Duke.

He moved like smoke—twisting, phasing, spinning through flame—then reappeared and drove Archie through a wall with a neon-charged punch.

"I," Duke snarled, forming a spinning green sphere in his palm, "AM—"

The sphere detonated.

Light shredded the room. Stone split. Shards screamed outward.

"DUKE!"

Olsen skidded to a stop, silver Power Gem blazing in his hand. "WAIT!"

Duke turned, unimpressed. "Why waste my time?" He sneered. "I've got bigger things than playing hero tag with kids."

"Not today."

Olsen tackled him mid-air.

They smashed through a wall and *kept falling*—punches traded, elbows snapping, boots colliding—then Duke's jets ignited. Wings flared. They spiraled skyward, green comets streaking behind them.

They crashed into a tower.

Neon bullets ripped free. Olsen swung—*HAMMER IMPACT*—Duke countered, his arm reshaping into a glowing

blade. Missiles burst from his shoulders, screaming into the forest below.

Explosions rippled. Trees snapped like twigs.

The silver Power Gem skidded across the dirt.

Duke's eyes locked onto it.

"What Earthnite could do this?" He grabbed Olsen by the throat, crushed, then tossed him aside. "This one."

Missiles streaked downward.

The forest erupted.

Prince, Archie, Ella, Eli dove back into the fight—beast forms roaring, elements blazing.

"Company," Duke muttered.

Panels opened along his back.

Twelve missiles armed.

The battlefield ignited—blasts flashing, trees vaporizing, stone cracking as neon arcs stabbed the sky.

Then—

Demaurion *hit him*.

A massive Leviathan form burst from the smoke, jaws clamping down on Duke's arm cannon. Sparks flew. Metal screamed.

Duke backhanded him mid-air, jets flaring, and rocketed upward.

"FUCKING COWARD!" Demaurion roared after him.

Ella staggered, eyes wide. "He—he took the Power Gem."

Olsen stared up at the darkening clouds, rain starting to fall through smoke and ash.

"...Dang it."

Duke was already gone.

At the Land of Hearts in a dark cave

Meanwhile, Don stirred in a dark cave, cold droplets echoing around him. Alone, lost, and shrouded in shadow, he shook his head, trying to make sense of where Krane had sent him.

Cobwebs brushed his face; insects skittered in the gloom. No exit was visible—just the silence of night and his own thoughts.

His mind was a storm—memories of what he'd done swirling with a gnawing doubt. The Scourge Don inside him pushed forward, but a voice within whispered of lost free will, of a fractured soul trapped behind the rage.

He clutched the Passion and Incarceration Gems, knowing the path ahead demanded he collect them all to raid Celestia.

Power—he thought—was the prize. But was power worth the cost?

Conflicted and haunted, Don wrestled with his fading self, tears burning behind his eyes. He wanted to come back. To forgive. To be a Hero.

But the Scourge had stolen that choice.

His heart shattered quietly as his old self dissolved like dust in a desert storm.

Then, a gentle voice broke through the darkness.

"Do you need help?"

⊗ #1.25 — Two Business Men ⊗

The two walked through Scarletsville like corporate mercenaries on a lunch break—calm, casual, and completely out of place in a volcanic wasteland. Crimson clouds hung overhead while smoke drifted through the air like black ink in water. Rivers of molten lava churned below the narrow rocky path beneath their feet.

Overbrawl glanced over.

"Why are we searching for them again after hiding them?"

Krane groaned and rubbed his forehead.

"The Gems can't survive forever without protection. Scattering them kept them away from Incarceration, but if they're left out here, they'll eventually sink into the lava or get destroyed. Better we recover them before they're gone for good."

They continued forward, eyes scanning every ridge and crevice.

"We're close."

Behind a jagged rock formation twisted at an unnatural angle, they found it.

A glowing orange Power Gem.

The Fury Gem.

Violent energy radiated from the hexagonal crystal, causing the air around it to ripple.

"Bingo."

Krane snatched it up in one fluid motion, turning it over in his hand.

Overbrawl eyed it carefully.

"Looks angry."

A sudden roar split the sky.

Both Zeniths tensed at once.

Krane lifted his watch. Overbrawl's body surged with unstable, explosive pressure, like something inside him was waking up wrong.

"COME OUT AND CATCH THESE HANDS!"

The roar rolled across Scarletsville like a breaking sky.

Above them, thrusters screamed.

A neon-green streak punched through the clouds, cutting straight down like a falling star.

Krane's eyes narrowed. "What is tha—"

Overbrawl tightened his grip on the Fury Gem.

Then recognition hit Krane like a delayed alarm.

Duke.

Jetfire State.

Krane moved first.

BOOM.

They collided midair. Mountains nearby evaporated into molten dust, shockwaves ripping through the volcanic ridges.

Duke reacted instantly, catching Krane mid-impact by the leg and whipping him through the landscape. Krane tore across stone and magma like a broken meteor skipping the planet.

Overbrawl charged next.

His fist dropped like a collapsing tower.

Duke slipped it clean.

Then he started dismantling him.

Right hook. Left hook. Knee. Elbow. Spinning backhand.

That was a perfect chain of violence that ended with Overbrawl getting launched across Scarletsville like a burning shell.

Krane reappeared in a flash.

Duke was already there.

A neon punch detonated across Krane's face, lighting the whole valley in green-white glare.

Krane slid back, grinning through it. "No flashy entrance?"

No reply.

Only the pulse in Duke's chest, like a neon heart refusing to slow down.

They clashed again.

Fists met. Energy burst outward in violent rings.

Krane dipped under a kick and drove a Spirit-charged punch straight into Duke's chest, launching him skyward.

"SHOULD'VE THOUGHT SOONER!"

Overbrawl dropped in from above, slamming Duke down into the valley floor. The impact detonated the ground into a crater wide enough to swallow terrain.

Duke bounced out of the explosion anyway.

No hesitation.

He tackled Krane and drove both of them straight into Scarletsville's molten depths.

Inside the earth, everything turned red and screaming.

Stone exploded. Lava split. The core of the world groaned as they tore through it.

"ZENITHS WERE NEVER A CHALLENGE TO ME!"

Duke broke off a strike, accelerated, grabbed Krane, and launched them both upward in a violent burst.

They shot out of the ground and back into the sky, trading blows so fast the air couldn't keep up.

"THEY WERE ALWAYS PITIFUL!"

Krane answered with a brutal combo—straight punch, side kick, axe kick.

The final strike sent Duke crashing down like a falling comet.

"You're a TEENAGER!"

Overbrawl rushed again.

Duke vanished.

Then reappeared behind him.

Neon strikes erupted from every angle, Overbrawl got hit from directions that didn't even feel physically possible. The final blow launched him into the sky like debris.

Duke grabbed him mid-air and threw him away like broken armor.

Krane came back in glowing violet speed.

Duke answered with missile fire from his arm.

Krane weaved through the explosions, threading between them like he'd memorized the sky.

One. Two. Three.

The blasts chased him while he returned fire with spiritual shots of his own.

"RAAGH!"

Duke flared neon again.

The sky turned into a war zone of light and impact.

Every collision cracked the clouds above Scarletsville.

Krane finally broke through—his fist buried into Duke's stomach.

Duke folded, then hit the ground hard enough to fracture the terrain in layers.

He coughed blood.

Krane descended slowly. "Your time has come—"

Duke vanished.

Krane's eyes snapped wide.

Suddenly—he was everywhere.

Afterimages flooded the battlefield. Neon silhouettes attacking from every direction.

Krane blocked one. Then another. Then another.

But Duke slipped behind him.

"NEON INSANITY!"

A single aerial kick bent the air itself.

It connected.

Krane launched like a cannon, blasting through a mountain before slamming directly into Overbrawl.

BOOOOM.

The collision detonated the landscape. Lava erupted. The earth folded upward in broken layers.

Silence.

Dust drifted over Scarletsville like falling ash.

Krane and Overbrawl lay buried in rubble.

Duke stood untouched.

Unmoving.

Unshaken.

The neon heart in his chest pulsed faster, brighter—like it was feeding on the silence.

Two Zeniths.

Down.

For the first time recorded in Avangard history.

Duke walked forward and pulled the Fury Gem from Overbrawl's hand like it weighed nothing.

A grin formed.

"You two did great."

He examined the gem.

"Thanks for collecting these for me."

His jets folded back into a compact pack as he returned to his base form.

"Consider it tribute."

He turned away.

"Two down. Seven to go."

A twitch.

Krane moved.

Barely.

His trembling hand rose toward his watch.

"Wait..."

The device suddenly glowed red.

Spiritual energy.

Fire energy.

Both spiraled together violently.

Duke looked back.

"What are you gonna do? Hit me with your puppy wa—"

BOOOOOOOM!!

A cataclysmic explosion swallowed Scarletsville.

The air warped.

Lava erupted from the ground.

The earth shook as if reality itself had been struck.

For a moment, everything disappeared beneath fire and smoke.

Then the dust cleared.

Krane lay on the ground, barely conscious.

Breathing.

Bleeding.

Broken.

Footsteps echoed through the flames.

Slow.

Steady.

A silhouette emerged.

Duke.

Untouched.

Krane's cracked eyes widened.

"No... way..."

Neon light glowed from Duke's eyes.

His exposed heart continued to pulse inside his chest.

One arm cannon was gone, the damage left behind by Demaurion.

But from his remaining arm, darkness gathered.

A black sword materialized in his grasp.

Its blade shimmered with glowing green energy.

Duke stared down at the fallen Zeniths.

"Weaklings."

His grip tightened around the sword.

"You really thought that would stop me?"

Rufty Mountains — Flatlands

The sky above was a blanket of stars, untouched by clouds or rain, the silver-white moon watching in silence. The battlefield was still—quiet, except for the occasional pained breath or shuffle.

Lonnie Mae used her vines to heal the group, wrapping them just tightly enough to stabilize wounds. It worked, mostly. Cuts remained, bruises still colored their skin, but the pain had dulled. Emely sat down with a tired exhale.

"He's really—done."

Kai peeked out from behind a rock—he'd been knocked out early and missed most of the fight. Javier scanned the area with tired eyes, then paused.

"Didn't anyone else see Overbrawl? And that other Zenith—

the one with the watch?"

Mason nodded. "Yeah. They were here... and then they vanished with Don."

Lonnie Mae and Anhia helped Ryan to his feet. His chest was still aching, but he was alive. Barely. If Don's strike had landed just inches closer to his heart, he wouldn't be.

Kayson's phone buzzed. He pulled it from his pocket—cracked and scorched—and blinked at the screen.

"Olsen's calling."

Jocabed grabbed the phone and answered before he could finish. The screen lit up with Olsen's face, flanked by Prince, Demaurion, Archie, Eli, and Ella.

"You guys good?! What happened?!" Olsen's voice cracked through the speaker.

Kwa'asja stepped in. "We tried to bring Don back. Again. But he attacked us—he almost killed Ryan."

"And Overbrawl wasn't alone," Lonnie Mae added. "There was another Zenith. They vanished with Don."

Olsen paused, then rubbed his head. "Wait... who was the other Zenith?"

Javier leaned in. "He was purple. Wore a watch. Controlled fire and spiritual energy at the same time."

"That's the one who captured us!" Olsen exclaimed.

"You guys got captured?!" Emely hovered over the phone in shock.

"And imprisoned," Archie added, dead serious.

"We're calling to warn you," Olsen continued. "There's someone else—his name's Duke. He's hunting Power Gems. After our fight, he didn't finish me. He just took the Gem and left."

Everyone exchanged uneasy glances.

"Don had Power Gems too," Jocabed said. "One pink. One black."

Olsen's voice sharpened. "Then it's real. He's going after all of them. And if he collects them... it could be catastrophic. We have to get them to Celestia. Seal them away before any of these maniacs—Incarceration, Dreadixz, Overbrawl, Duke, that unknown Zenith, Dark Don, even Scourge Don—gets their hands on them."

He hung up.

"That's another crisis added to the list," Keyler muttered, checking off a spider-thread notebook.

Jocabed stared at the ground. "Don said something about free will."

"Incarceration manipulated him," Sophia added. "Maybe... he didn't choose this. Maybe he was forced."

"You're right," said a voice—low and familiar.

Everyone turned. From the shadows, a figure emerged. Silver scales shimmered faintly beneath the moonlight.

It was Dark Don.

His suit was cracked, caked with dried mud.

"How are you—not—paralyzed?!" Mason shouted, tension coiling through him.

Weapons ignited, energy crackling in the air.

"Relax," Dark Don said, raising his hands slowly. "I'm not here to fight. I'm here to talk."

Everyone hesitated, then lowered their weapons.

Dark Don nodded toward Jocabed. "He didn't turn on you willingly."

He stepped closer, voice steady. "I tracked him after the Grolian Forest incident. Planned to stop him myself if I had to. But what I found... was him tied in vines, hero suit shredded,

clutching a Power Gem."

He looked up at the moon. "The Incarceration Gem. One of the darkest. It doesn't just corrupt—it amplifies fear, shame, doubt. Twists it into anger. If you don't know how to fight it, it changes who you are... violently."

Keyler stepped forward. "Then why did he call us 'friends'? He sounded... confused."

Dark Don's gaze was sharp. "He meant it. He always did. But the Gem doesn't let you think clearly. It magnifies every fear you have about yourself. Every failure, every awkward moment, every time you felt small or judged. It screamed at him that he wasn't enough. That he would never be enough."

Gasps rippled through the group. Emely swayed. Lonnie Mae's voice shook.

"What did we do?"

Dark Don's eyes softened, still calm. "Nothing malicious. You laughed. You teased. He made mistakes around you. But the Gem twisted those normal moments into a narrative where he thought he was disposable, unworthy of belonging."

He paused, letting the weight settle.

"He didn't turn into Scourge Don because he hates you. He turned because he was terrified. Terrified of failing, of being judged, of letting everyone down. The Gem amplified it. It showed him a world where he belonged nowhere... and he fought that fear by becoming stronger,more violent, more untouchable."

Dark Don stepped closer, voice like distant thunder. "And I know this because I tracked him, felt the change in his aura, studied the way the Gem warped his energy. I know the real Don—the part that still cares, that still fights for you."

Sophia whispered, softly. "So he didn't betray us. He just...

doesn't believe we're on his side anymore."

Mason crossed his arms, frowning. "Then how do we fix it?"

Dark Don turned, shadow stretching across the ground. "You don't fix fear. You face it. You show him that even when he feels small, even when he doubts, he isn't alone. That's the only way to pull him back."

He glanced over his shoulder. "Come along. The longer you wait, the harder it gets."

⊗ #1.26 — "BACK AWAY!" ⊗

The group walked through the Rufty Mountains under the night sky. Rocks jagged protrude from the ground, and large mountains that towered them were standing side by side from each other, some scattered.

Crickets were heard in the night, while birds flew through the sky above the clouds. The walk was slow and silent, Dark Don led the group. Nobody was talking after the last discussion, until someone decided to speak up.

"So, who's the purple Zenith? Olsen warned us about him, and we barely got any information." Daysni asked. Dark Don turned to her, "You mean Krane? See, Krane is a former Zenith. He got obsessed with power just like Incarceration, so he went into his own path... That watch he wears allows him to maximize or combine his spiritual and thermal energy."

He coughed lightly, then let his gaze fall to the ground.

The crew walked along the flatlands of the Rufty Mountains, and then they finally entered the end of the Grolian Forest. Large green trees that were wet and were completely surrounded by large fern bushes and leaves were sitting right in front of them. It looked like a whole jungle because of the amount of trees foresting the area.

But there was a large mossy cave in the middle of the exit, and

it was hidden by the leaves and gigantic ferns. Dark Don walked in, his cybernetic shoes squelching the mud. Dark Don sliced through the leaves and ferns with his other arm that was made out of lunar energy.

As he cut through them, a massive cave appeared right in front of them. There were lights in the cave that emerged from it, and then Dark Don turned to the group, cocking his head towards the entrance of the cave. "Forgotten Wizard's Domain..."

In the cave at the Land of Hearts

It was Starla.

The Celestianite Dragon princess stood at the mouth of the cave, her silhouette framed by dim violet light. Scorch lingered just behind her, wings half-spread, eyes locked forward—alert, ready.

Scourge Don didn't move.

He stood in the shadows like part of the stone itself, filth streaked across his armor, purple energy leaking faintly from beneath the mask. His gaze stayed fixed on them, unblinking.

A low hiss scraped out of his throat.

Starla didn't stop walking.

She crossed the cave floor with steady steps, unbothered, while Scorch matched her pace, his own hiss answering Don's like a warning bell.

"You're the one from the Rufty Mountains," Starla said, slowing as she studied him openly. Not fear. Curiosity. "Didn't expect to see you again. And wow—" her eyes flicked over the grime, the damage, the exhaustion he wasn't hiding very well, "—you somehow look worse."

"Back away," Don snarled.

Starla scoffed. "Yeah, there it is. Attitude confirmed."

"I don't need help," Don snapped. "Not yours. Not anyone's." He turned sharply, starting for the far end of the cave. "Leave me alone and I'll disappear."

He made it three steps.

Starla's talons snapped around his tail, lifting him clean off the ground.

"Absolutely not," she said flatly. "Look at you."

Don thrashed. "Put me down!"

"You're filthy," she continued, unimpressed. "You smell like rot and bad decisions."

"PUT ME DOWN, CELESTIANITE!"

She did—gently, deliberately—setting him on his feet like a parent returning a feral animal to the floor.

Don stumbled back, breathing hard. "I have better things to do than—than whatever this is."

Starla grabbed him again, this time under the arms, firm and unyielding.

"Nope," she said. "You're getting cleaned. And then we're talking. Because this?" She gestured at him. "This is *not* what the Chosen One of prophecy is supposed to look like."

Don groaned as Scorch fell in behind them, close enough to make escape a fantasy.

They exited the cave in a blur of motion.

Starla tossed Don forward, and he hit the ground hard, pain jolting through him as dust exploded around his body. He pushed himself up, brushing dirt from his ruined hero suit like it mattered.

"Alright!" Starla said brightly, clapping her talons together. "Let's break into someone's house and fix you."

Don ignored her.

His attention was stolen by the city.

Towering pink and crimson spires crowded the skyline, wrapped around a slender central castle like petals around a stem. Blushinites filled the air, wings flashing red, white, and rose as they laughed, flirted, danced mid-flight.

Heart-shaped lights drifted lazily through the sky. Music echoed from somewhere unseen—warm, alive. The heavens above glowed orange and pink, the sunset settling over the city like a protective veil.

Don stared.

Something inside him stirred.

Why me... a quieter voice whispered.

Scourge Don shoved it down instantly, turning back to Starla. "Where."

She didn't answer.

Instead, she grabbed him and placed him firmly onto her back.

Don froze.

Scorch flew close, eyes never leaving him.

Starla spread her wings. "Hold on."

They launched.

Warm wind rushed over her scales as she soared, banking gracefully, spinning once just because she could. Scorch flew straight and steady beside her, watching Don like a loaded weapon.

They broke through a layer of clouds, and the sound hit him—voices.

Blushinites singing. Soundanites harmonizing with them. Ethereal, layered, impossibly gentle. The kind of music that didn't ask permission to exist—it simply did.

Starla smiled without thinking.

They descended toward a massive pink tower, landing before golden gates that parted at their approach. The plaza beyond teemed with life—shops buzzing, couples drifting together, laughter everywhere.

Inside, the hall glowed deep rose and gold. Ornate frames lined the walls. Light shimmered from chandeliers overhead. A long crimson carpet stretched toward three massive doors—one center, two flanking.

Don stayed silent, forcing the old emotions down, sealing them off.

Starla opened the middle door.

Steam curled into the air.

A grand white tub sat at the center of the room, filled with clear blue water drawn from the Gadian Sea, banners of gold and pink hanging high along the walls.

As Don shifted to climb down—

Starla threw him.

He hit the water with a violent splash, waves slamming against the marble as his suit darkened, soaked through in seconds.

For a moment, the surface stilled.

Then the bubbles rose.

Don burst from the water like he was escaping it.

He landed hard, palms scraping tile, water skidding across the floor in wild arcs. Steam hung low in the air, thick and sour. For half a second, it looked like he might run.

He didn't get the chance.

Starla's tail snapped out and coiled around his ankle, yanking him back before his weight even shifted.

"And where do you think you're going?" she said.

Don twisted, teeth bared beneath the mask. "I am not doing this."

Scorch didn't answer. He just tipped a bucket.

Cold water slammed into Don's back. Starla used the opening—one sharp pull, one controlled shove—and Don hit the tub again, water swallowing the sound of his impact.

He came up slowly this time.

The bubbles parted around his shoulders. His posture was rigid. Not defensive—*locked*. The mask hid his face, but his eyes burned through it, purple and unstable, like a dying star trying to decide whether to collapse or explode.

Starla didn't smile. She didn't joke. She leaned against the edge of the tub, close enough that he couldn't pretend she wasn't there.

"Enough," she said. "I'm not here to scrub you. I'm here because you're breaking things."

Don snorted. "Bold accusation."

"You didn't deny it."

Silence stretched. The water sloshed once, then settled.

Starla exhaled through her nose. "You don't talk like this. You don't look at people like they're already dead. Whatever you're wearing—" she tapped the mask lightly, "—that isn't you."

Don's jaw tightened. "You don't know what I am."

"I know what you were," she shot back. "And I know this isn't strength. It's containment."

That landed.

Not hard. Just enough.

She straightened and glanced over her shoulder. "Oscar."

A short figure stepped in like he'd been waiting outside the whole time. Black shirt, pink stripes, gray pants, flamingo wings folded neatly behind him. He held two mirrors under his arm—not theatrical, not dramatic. Just... tools.

He handed them over without a word.

Starla took one and held it up in front of Don.

"Look," she said.

Don didn't move.

"Don."

Slowly, he did.

The mirror caught the mask, the cracks in the glow of his eyes, the way his shoulders were pulled too tight, like he was bracing for impact that never came.

Starla lowered the mirror just a little. "This isn't corruption. It's occupation."

Don's fingers curled against the tub's edge.

She set the mirror down. No metaphors. No puzzles.

"I heard Ella," Starla said quietly. "Everything. About the forest. About Incarceration. About how he doesn't break people—he convinces them they were already broken."

Don laughed once. It was hollow. Automatic.

"And what," he said, "you're here to convince me otherwise?"

"No," she said. "I'm here to tell you the truth."

She leaned in, voice low now—not gentle, not harsh. Honest.

"He doesn't need you loyal. He needs you *empty*. A crown that moves. A weapon that thinks it chose this."

That did it.

Don's breath hitched before he could stop it.

The water rippled as his body sank an inch, then another. The glow in his eyes flickered—dark, then bright, then dark again—like something inside him was clawing for the surface and slipping every time.

Starla moved fast.

She grabbed him under the arms and launched straight up.

Tile shattered. Steam tore apart. The ceiling exploded outward as they crashed through it and landed hard on the steel-pink

roof above.

The world opened.

Evening stretched across the sky in orange and rose, clouds drifting slow and careless like nothing was wrong anywhere. The sun sat low and heavy, watching without judgment.

Starla released him and stepped back, shifting into her base form as Scorch stayed behind, wisely pretending not to exist.

They sat at the edge.

Below them, the Blushinites moved through the streets—laughing, dancing, brushing hands, living like tomorrow was a given.

Don stared down at them.

His eyes wouldn't settle. Light fought shadow over and over again, no clear winner.

Starla didn't look at him when she spoke.

"You get to choose," she said. "Not who you serve. Who you protect. And yeah—those aren't always the same."

Don swallowed.

He stood, walked to the edge, and looked down like he was measuring the distance—not to the ground, but to himself.

Finally, he turned back to her.

"I can't stay," he said. His voice was quieter now. Raw. "Not like this."

Starla nodded once. No argument. No pressure.

Don took a step back.

"I need—" He stopped, jaw tightening. "I need to think."

Then he was gone.

Not running. Not fleeing.

Choosing space.

And for the first time, the sky didn't feel like it was closing in.

⊗ #1.27 — Betrayal and Eldritch ⊗

The crew moved silently through the cavern, their footsteps echoing softly against the stone walls. Dark Don led the way, his presence steady and unyielding, until they came to a wooden door standing before them. It was a simple, brown door, worn at the edges and dotted with a few splinters, unassuming yet somehow imposing. The door was wide but modest in height, the kind one might overlook—but here, it felt significant.

Dark Don pressed it open slowly. A creak sliced through the silence, and a burst of light poured from the doorway, so brilliant that everyone instinctively shielded their eyes. The glow burned against their retinas, forcing them to step carefully into the unknown.

As their eyes adjusted, the sight that greeted them was breath-taking. The room was a library of impossible scale, walls lined with shelves stacked with books in every shape, size, and hue—red, blue, pink, yellow, black, and other colors that seemed to shimmer and shift subtly in the light.

Some shelves housed arches containing swirling blue portal vortexes, their golden trim glinting faintly. Above, countless cogs rotated slowly, interlocking in intricate patterns, while jagged, rocky barbs dangled from the ceiling like stalactites

waiting to strike.

At the center of the room sat a grand table, massive and polished, with enough seats to host a dozen scholars. Lonnie Mae and Drake wandered among the shelves, eyes wide with awe.

"This is amazing!" Lonnie Mae squealed.

Drake lifted a book from a shelf—and a blue eye embedded in its cover blinked at him. "Okay... I've gotta admit, this is actually incredible," he said, a mixture of wonder and unease in his voice.

The rest of the crew scattered, exploring the library's labyrinthine stacks, while Dark Don stood back, arms crossed, expression grave.

Keyler crouched near a spider, his curiosity piqued. But this was no ordinary spider—it had sixteen legs instead of eight.

"I didn't know they had anything like this," he murmured.

Sophia frowned. "Double the legs, double the ugliness."

Dark Don's eyes swept the room. "The Forgotten Wizard should have arrived by now."

And then, a figure materialized through one of the blue portal vortexes.

He wore a crooked triangular hat and a flowing blue robe, adorned with faint, shifting runes that glimmered in the light. His long white beard swept toward his chest, pale, wrinkled skin hinting at centuries of knowledge, yet small, round spectacles perched crookedly on his nose gave him a slightly whimsical air. A wooden staff, topped with a glowing blue orb, pulsed with raw magical energy, casting flickering light across the library like a miniature sun. His shoes were scuffed and worn, his steps deliberate as he shuffled forward, relying on his staff for support.

He raised a gnarled hand in greeting, voice raspy but commanding:

"Hello, children... how are we today, hmm?" He coughed lightly, then squinted beneath his spectacles, sharp eyes assessing the crew with uncanny precision.

Magic crackled faintly along his fingertips, and with a subtle twist of his staff, several books floated slightly from the shelves, as if leaning closer to watch. Even Kai paused, sniffing the air cautiously before hopping onto Eldritch's shoulder, earning a low, gruff chuckle from the wizard.

"Looks like this one isn't hostile," Eldritch muttered, scratching his chin. "Who's raisin' him, I wonder?"

Sophia stepped forward, voice steady. "It was someone we lost... and we need to get him back, away from Incarceration's influence. Please... tell us how we can stop it."

Eldritch's lips curved into a small, knowing smile. "Ah... I've got just the thing."

He led the crew into a smaller section of the library, shelves packed tighter, dust motes floating in the air like tiny stars. After a few moments of searching, he produced a massive, ancient green tome, thick with dust and age. Blowing off the layer of dirt, he opened it with care, licked his fingers, and began flipping the pages.

He laid the book on the table, everyone leaning forward in anticipation. The page he stopped at read: "How to Make the Oligirath Potion."

The instructions were clear, five precise steps. Eldritch muttered a few arcane words, and with a flourish of his Magic Element, the ingredients appeared: two stacks of corn, a mouthful of Leviathan meat, two stacks of sugar, and water from the Gadian Sea.

He pulled out a massive metallic pot from under the table, poured in the ingredients, and stirred with a giant wooden spoon. At first, the mixture was a viscous, glowing blue slime. Slowly, as he continued to stir, it became more liquid, shimmering with faint pulses of magical energy.

When complete, Eldritch scooped a portion into a glass jar, and the liquid surged, glowing with life, pulsing with radiant energy from bottom to top. Handing it to Sophia, he said, voice steady and wise:

"Use this to help your little friend... and after that, help him fulfill that prophecy of his."

At King Dreadixz's Castle

Incarceration crossed the blood-red runner without a sound, like Foreshade itself refused to acknowledge him. The throne room compressed around his presence—marble whispering under strain, banners leaking pale moonlight, soldiers locked mid-breath like time had lost interest in them.

King Dreadixz sat fused to the throne, posture rigid, expression carefully carved into calm. Dead eyes. Controlled rage under glass.

"Tell me," Dreadixz said, voice sharpened into something surgical. "Did you place the gem?"

Incarceration stopped at the base of the dais and gave a small, precise nod. Not respect. Report.

"I buried it in the forest. Lured the Grolian Beast onto its path. When I returned... the beast was dead. The gem was gone."

A flicker crossed Dreadixz's face—gone before it could form into emotion.

"Scourge Don fought Dark Don and the beast in the same cycle," he said quietly. "Efficient." His gaze tightened. "Then why do you look disappointed?"

Incarceration smiled.

Small. Clean. Final.

"Our arrangement ends here."

The room reacted before Dreadixz did—air tightening, pressure spiking like the throne room itself had flinched.

"Don't call for me again," Incarceration added, stepping forward. "Not until you remember what you are."

The throne cracked as Dreadixz rose.

"You dare—" His voice snapped. "Incarceration. Explain yourself."

One finger lifted.

That was enough.

"I'm done carrying failure toward destiny." He closed the distance until even the throne felt irrelevant behind him. "Your obsession with grandeur cost you an army. A kingdom. Scourge Don will kneel eventually... and when he breaks, I discard him." A pause—cold, exact. "Just like you."

Something inside Dreadixz snapped loose.

"INCARCERATION!"

The roar fractured the chamber.

Metal erupted from his arm with a violent screech—twin blade forms folding out, veined in crawling red-black energy. He fired instantly: one slash toward the throne, another toward the ceiling.

The room detonated in crimson light.

Stone exploded outward. Lanterns shattered mid-glow. The ceiling ruptured, raining debris like falling judgment.

"GUARDS!" Dreadixz roared as his body warped—skin

splitting, form collapsing into something half-draconic, half-crowned instinct.

The doors burst open.

Dragon-blooded soldiers flooded in—wings snapping through air, spears leveled, devotion burning in their eyes.

Incarceration didn't even turn.

"Guards," he murmured. Almost amused. "How predictable."

His weapon rose.

The room answered immediately.

Red-black bolts stitched through the crowd with brutal precision. Bodies dropped mid-charge, mid-flight, mid-prayer. Armor meant nothing. Faith meant less. The chamber filled and emptied in the same breath until only silence remained.

When it stopped, the floor was a mosaic of ruin—blood glossing stone, broken shapes scattered where order used to be.

Dreadixz stood alone.

Incarceration walked forward until there was no throne room anymore—only two men and the space between them collapsing.

Dreadixz gathered lunar shadow in both hands and released it in a violent surge—dense, radiant darkness screaming across the room.

Incarceration shifted aside like he'd already read the outcome.

Then he moved in.

Impact came instantly—blade, fist, bone colliding in tight bursts of violence. Dreadixz caught him mid-exchange, spun him, and drove him into the floor. Stone cracked outward.

Incarceration rolled, rose, struck again.

Steel screamed. Sparks burst. The throne room fractured under their rhythm. Dreadixz answered with a brutal sword

swing that launched Incarceration through the outer wall.

Rain swallowed him.

He hit the ground hard.

Water mixed with blood as he pushed himself up, breathing rough—

—and smiling anyway.

He surged back in.

The fight turned sharper.

Faster.

Incarceration's blade traced silver arcs through rain and flesh. Dreadixz parried, countered, cut back. Every exchange landed. Neither gave space. For a moment, it felt balanced—like the world itself was holding its breath around their violence.

Then Dreadixz changed.

He dropped the sword.

Hands became claws. Moonlight flooded his form.

He exploded forward.

A claw strike tore through Incarceration's guard. A backhand shattered his stance. A lunar-charged blow emptied the air from his lungs and launched him through another wall in a collapsing burst of stone and rain.

Dust rolled across the wreckage.

Incarceration sat inside it, vision flickering, blood running cold down his armor.

Dreadixz loomed through the haze. "Pathetic," he said softly. "You call yourself a Zenith?"

Something inside Incarceration stopped behaving like bone.

Not fracture.

Shift.

He vanished.

No sound. No warning.

Reappeared inches away.

The world turned red-black.

Energy spilled out of him like an eclipse tearing open reality itself. Color drained. Space bent inward. Even the air felt like it forgot what it was supposed to be.

The strike fell.

Absolute.

Dreadixz was launched through stone, through rain, through night itself—his body breaking the landscape as he vanished into distance.

The crimson light died instantly.

Foreshade went silent.

Rain kept falling like nothing had happened.

Incarceration stood alone among the ruins, weapon cooling in his grip. He looked at the aftermath. At the silence. At his hands.

Something satisfied settled in.

Then something hungrier followed.

He turned away.

Scourge Don wasn't finished yet.

Useful things rarely were.

And in the back of his mind—cold as prophecy, sharp as a sentence already passed—his next order formed without sound:

Find him.

Bring him to Celestia.

Then let everything collapse.

⊗ #1.28 — Dust of Duke ⊗

Overbrawl and Krane lay half-buried in scorched earth, the ground still glowing where repeated impacts had rewritten its structure. Firestorms rolled behind them, painting the sky in unstable shades of orange and ember red. Duke stood over both like a verdict that hadn't finished being delivered.

His cannon was raised. The Power Gem pulsed in his grip like a stolen heartbeat refusing to settle.

Neon green eyes narrowed, precise and cold.

A quiet laugh slipped out.

"Perfect. Another win."

He tilted his head slightly.

"And consider yourselves lucky. If either of you were Lunaranite, you'd already be ash."

Krane pushed himself up just enough to glare through blood and dust.

"What do you mean?"

Duke's expression shifted immediately, cooling into something flat.

"Not your problem."

He turned away like the conversation had already ended, stepping through broken stone and burning wind as if the

battlefield had already been reassigned to him.

Overbrawl shifted beside Krane, voice rough.

"Bro... we can't just let him walk off with the Power Gem."

Krane coughed, trying to rise and failing halfway.

"We don't have the strength to stop him."

A beat of silence stretched between them.

Then Overbrawl forced himself up anyway.

Cracked armor. Shaking legs. Breath dragging like a collapsing engine.

"Here we go again..."

Duke stopped mid-step.

Slow turn.

That same half-smirk returned, but it wasn't playful anymore. It was dismissive.

"So you're still standing." His voice lowered slightly. "Why. You can't even scratch me like this."

Overbrawl tightened his fists until his knuckles trembled.

"I'm a mercenary." He exhaled once. "I chase paychecks. I don't stop until I can afford the future I want."

His eyes sharpened.

"Even if it kills me."

Duke lifted his cannon again.

Clean aim. No hesitation. No doubt.

End condition ready.

Krane staggered up beside Overbrawl.

"I'm not letting him fight alone."

Another beat.

They both lifted their fists.

"Come on. Try us."

Something shifted in Duke's stance.

Not fear.

Interest.

"Fine," he said quietly. "One more round."

The world broke open.

They moved.

Krane hit first.

His fist buried into Duke's midsection, ripping air and balance out of him in the same strike. A follow-up uppercut ignited immediately, snapping Duke's head back and launching him upward like a malfunctioning star.

"These gems." Duke roared midair, voice cracking under pressure. "They're mine."

Overbrawl appeared above him instantly and drove him back down with a meteor-like smash. Duke slammed through jagged spires, skidding across molten rock before Krane was already there again.

Blazing punches. Spirit-infused strikes. Each impact stacked like a chain reaction that refused to stop once it started. A brutal kick sent Duke spinning across the battlefield.

Overbrawl warped behind him and landed a crushing blow to the spine.

Duke shot upward again.

Krane met him mid-flight and drove him straight back into the ground with a thunderous impact that split the terrain and scattered burning debris into the sky.

Duke hit. Rolled. Twisted.

Overbrawl dropped from above and buried him into a crater with a full-force overhead strike.

Dust exploded outward.

Still, Duke pushed up.

Neon light leaked through his skin like pressure trying to escape a cracked container.

"The gems aren't treasures," he snarled. "They're survival. They're the only reason I'm still moving forward."

Overbrawl stepped forward immediately.

"Then your future ends here."

The clash resumed.

Duke surged upward in a blur, neon fists cutting through the air like blades. Krane intercepted with rapid spirit-formed strikes, but Duke slipped through the pattern and cracked him with a hook that sent him spinning into debris.

Overbrawl rushed in.

Duke vanished mid-step, reappeared behind him, and drove an axe kick straight into his back, slamming him into the ground.

Teleport forward.

Both fists.

Impact.

The explosion painted the battlefield in green and white light.

"Without them." Duke slammed Krane into the earth again and again, each impact deeper than the last. "I'll have nothing."

Krane coughed blood into the dirt.

"Then you've already lost."

That snapped something loose.

Overbrawl erupted with red energy, beams carving molten lines across the battlefield. Duke charged straight through it, glowing like a collapsing star refusing to die.

"The future will belong to me."

Overbrawl blinked in front of Krane, seized the opening, and detonated a final strike that launched Duke skyward in a spray of blood and light.

Duke twisted midair.

Then vanished into a neon streak across the horizon.

Silence dropped hard.

Overbrawl and Krane stood alone in the ruin, barely upright, bodies shaking like stability was something they had to relearn.

Then, from the smoke, calm and distant.

"Hand over the Power Gem..."

⊗ #1.29 — Conflict ⊗

A shadow pushed through the smoke.

Stone peeled, plates shearing apart as each step pressed gravity downward, the ground buckling beneath it.

Olsen.

From below, he loomed—jagged armor locking into place, stone crawling over his frame in grinding waves, his silhouette sharpening as the dust fled from him like prey.

"Drop the Gem."

His voice didn't echo.

It cut.

The world narrowed to the orange crystal between Krane and Overbrawl.

Krane's gaze flicked to it, spiritual fire coiling beneath his skin—violet radiance creeping along his arms in precise, geometric lines. He exhaled slowly, the air trembling with contained pressure.

"...You walked into Zenith territory," he said evenly. "That was a decision."

Overbrawl wiped blood from his jaw. Chaos energy spilled from the cracks in his grin—jagged ribbons of distorted light whipping around his shoulders, crawling across the ground,

snapping back like living wire.

"You ever feel the moment before everything breaks?" he laughed.

"This is that moment."

Ella stepped forward. Sand lifted, grains vibrating, spiraling into tight halos around her legs.

"If that Gem stays with you," she said, steady, "the world burns."

Prince flickered into existence beside her—lightning sprinting across his frame, static rain hissing off his skin.

"So yeah," he added. "Hand it over."

The air lurched.

Chaos and spirit rose together.

Overbrawl's energy lunged, ripping outward in crooked arcs that sawed through the air. Krane's power followed, a lattice of violet fire climbing the sky, spiraling into controlled rings and hovering sigils.

Two Zeniths.

Overbrawl tucked the Gem deeper into his scarf.

"Come get it."

The battlefield answered.

Lava veins ignited beneath the obsidian plain, molten light flooding upward as heat poured into the air, the ground breathing like a living thing.

"Formation C—" Olsen started.

"DONE TALKING."

Fire detonated.

Archie became a violent brushstroke, a ribbon of incandescent flame slicing across the battlefield. The ground unzipped beneath him, stone exploding in his wake as pressure screamed outward.

"ARCHIE—!"

Gone.

Archie hit Overbrawl first, flaming fist sawing through space—

—and stopped.

Overbrawl caught it.

Not braced.

Not strained.

Chaos crawled over his arm, thickening into a jagged gauntlet of molten distortion.

"Too loud," Overbrawl grinned.

He twisted.

The world whipped.

Archie slammed into the ground in a crater of fire and shattered stone, shockwaves rippling outward as his flames stuttered.

Olsen charged.

Stone surged up his arms, armor forming in jagged spires as he drove a seismic punch toward Krane—

Krane raised one hand.

Violet energy peeled outward, forming a rotating cube of sigils around Olsen's arm. The punch landed—

—and froze.

Spiritual fire climbed Olsen's stone, locking joints, freezing motion.

"...Impressive density," Krane observed. "Poor flexibility."

He snapped his fingers.

The cube collapsed inward.

Olsen was launched, skidding across molten rock, stone tearing loose from his frame.

Prince flickered—glitch-stepped—reappearing midair beside

Krane in a slashing streak of lightning.

The kick landed.

Thunder detonated.

Krane slid back, boots carving glowing trenches into the ground, violet fire fizzing around him.

"Fast," he said calmly. "But alone."

Five sigils unfolded behind him, forming a spinning halo of fractured geometry.

Prince blurred—

—and stopped.

Static froze around his limbs as spiritual chains snapped tight.

Overbrawl dropped.

He didn't fall—he collapsed the sky.

Chaos poured downward in a spiraling pillar as he smashed Olsen into the ground again, the impact fracturing the battlefield in widening rings.

"C'mon!" Overbrawl laughed. "Stay up!"

Ella struck from above, sand flooding outward in a spiraling wave—

Overbrawl let it hit.

Then grabbed her wrist.

Chaos snapped tight.

"Too soft."

He drove her downward.

The earth buckled.

Krane flickered—frame-skipped—reappearing behind Archie in a smeared afterimage.

Two strikes.

Precise.

Fire collapsed in Archie's chest, flames sputtering like drowning stars.

"You telegraph," Krane said. "Every attack."

"SPIRIT MAELSTROM."

Violet energy erupted into spiraling lances that chased Archie, carving glowing scars through the air.

Ella raised a sand dome—

It shattered, fragments scattering like broken constellations.

Krane seized her midair and threw.

Overbrawl caught her by the skull.

Chaos roared.

He slammed her into the ground, the impact sending shockwaves racing outward, mountains trembling beneath the force.

Then the Zeniths unleashed hell.

Chaos didn't strike—it hunted, whirling in jagged ribbons that snapped and recoiled with every punch. Spiritual fire threaded through it, blades of violet radiance cutting with surgical intent.

Olsen collapsed to one knee, blood dark against stone.

Prince vanished beneath rubble.

Archie struggled to breathe, fire leaking from his fingers in broken pulses.

From below, the Zeniths towered.

Krane adjusted his stance.

"Finish it."

The air hummed.

Green light bled into the battlefield.

Time stuttered.

Ash froze mid-fall. Lava hung suspended, glowing veins paused like frozen lightning. Chaos and spirit locked mid-strike.

Eli stood trembling, emerald radiance fuzzing around him, vision lagging as reality strained.

"...Now."

He moved outside time.

Hands carving arcs through frozen violence, he pulled chaos and spirit apart—misaligning their rhythms, forcing interference.

Time snapped back.

The Zeniths' energies collided.

Chaos surged where precision demanded control.

Overbrawl staggered, laughter breaking into surprise.

Krane's eyes widened—just a flicker.

"...Temporal desync."

That was enough.

Archie forced his flames white-hot, driving Overbrawl backward in a spiraling pillar of fire.

Prince exploded free, lightning flooding the space point-blank.

Olsen surged forward, stone blade growing from his arm.

Ella bound debris tight, sand climbing and crushing inward.

The Gem tore free, tumbling.

Eli snapped a temporal net around it—green energy weaving into a glowing lattice.

Krane's watch screamed, unstable light fracturing outward.

"You've forced instability," he snarled.

Olsen answered with steel.

The blade drove into Krane's chest.

Violet fire spilled, spiritual energy leaking into the ground as Krane collapsed.

Overbrawl tried to rise.

Chaos flickered.

He laughed anyway.

"...Worth it."

Silence followed.

The Chosen regrouped—ruined, barely standing.

Demaurion finally stepped down.

"Wow," Olsen snapped.

"I conserve energy."

"You didn't move!"

"Oceananites are built different."

Eli lowered his hands, emerald glow fading as he secured the Gem.

Olsen wiped blood from his face.

"We didn't win," he said.

"We survived."

He turned.

"Don's still out there. Move."

At Celestia

The sky over Celestia stayed wrapped in golden clouds, like the whole kingdom had its own permanent sunset. Towers rose up everywhere—massive gold, white, and yellow buildings shimmering like they were carved from sunlight itself. Streets glowed golden. Sidewalks sparkled. Even the poles had glitter sprinkled on 'em.

Dragons flew overhead, cutting through sunbeams like living comets. The air buzzed with the wingbeats of Celestianite dragons, their white and gold scales flashing in the light. Below them, millions of Celestianites filled the kingdom—dragons and people both. Shimmering scales. Feathered tails. Armor flashing.

From a distance, past the crowded city blocks, stood a giant golden staircase leading up to a blinding set of gates. Behind those gates sat Celestia Castle: a towering monster of a structure

with ten golden spires stabbing into the sky so high the top disappeared into space. The tallest tower touched the stars, literally. A flag with a golden dragon emblem waved at the peak.

Inside that castle, top floor, golden everything: four figures sat at a long, shining table in the middle of a room big enough to feel like its own sky.

Jaylen. Guervens. Coltz. Prince Lock.

Golden arc-windows wrapped around the chamber like a halo, each one spilling shimmering light across the marble floor. Outside, clouds drifted through starlight—like the whole meeting was happening inside a floating palace above the sky.

Prince Lock sat at the far end of the long crystal table.

Still. Unmoving. Silent.

His white scales glowed like moonlit armor, subtle pulses rippling under the surface. One horn shimmered purple, the other gold. Purple stardust fell from his wings every time he shifted even an inch. The golden bands around his tail chimed softly whenever he breathed.

Nobody in that room dared interrupt Lock.

Jaylen sat to his right—calm, precise, focused. Cyan eyes sharp behind yellow-cyan Celestianite armor. His retractable wings folded neatly against the chair like they were waiting to snap open at a moment's notice.

Coltz lounged across from him, slumped sideways in the chair like he was at a sleepover instead of a war meeting. Golden energy flickered at his fingertips as he spun a glowing pebble like a coin.

Then there was Guervens.

Red-and-black armor. Magma scars glowing under his dark skin. The kind of dude you heard before you saw.

And today?

He was at 110%.

He slammed both palms on the crystalline table, voice echoing like a volcano clearing its throat.

"Ay, Jaylen! You dragged us up to the top floor for WHAT? To vibe? To meditate? To look at clouds like philosophers?"

Jaylen didn't even blink.

"We've got a problem. Lunaranites."

Guervens groaned so loud the windows rattled.

"Bro. AGAIN? Nah—nah, this is déjà vu. I swear we did this EXACT meeting like four times—"

Jaylen raised a hand.

"This isn't a repeat. This one's different."

Coltz didn't look up from his glowing coin.

"Different how? They get taller? Shinier? Smell worse?"

Lock finally moved.

Just his eyes.

A slow turn.

Sharp as blades.

"No jokes," Lock said quietly. "This isn't a food raid. It's war."

Jaylen stood, tension coiled in every movement.

"Colton's last intel run confirmed it. They're mobilizing again. But this time, something's off."

Coltz stopped spinning the pebble.

Guervens straightened, heat radiating off him.

Jaylen clenched his fists, burst of cyan energy flicking across his knuckles.

"Dreadixz wasn't the one giving orders."

Silence slammed into the room.

Even Lock's wings froze mid-glimmer.

Guervens squinted.

"Wait—so who's bossing Lunaranites around now? Who's above Dreadixz?!"

Jaylen shook his head.

"I don't have a face. Not yet. Just a name."

The room leaned in.

"Midnight."

Guervens's chair flew backward as he leapt to his feet.

"MIDNIGHT?! The ONE hour I'm actually asleep? That's disrespectful at this point!"

Lock folded his wings, voice low.

"They're striking when our guard drops. Classic predator timing."

Jaylen pointed at the glowing map projected above the table.

"And our numbers? Worse than last cycle. With King Vigilzante gone—"

Coltz wiped his grin off his face.

"Man carried the kingdom on his back..."

Jaylen nodded.

"Which means we're outmatched. And out-timed. We need outside help."

Guervens jabbed a finger at him.

"Then SAY it, Jaylen! Quit monologuing and tell us the plan!"

Jaylen inhaled slow.

Then he said it:

"We're pulling in the Chosen Ones."

The atmosphere snapped.

Air tightened.

Even the light felt different.

Coltz sat up, golden sparks crackling across his shoulders.

"Finally something fun."

Guervens slammed a fist into his palm.

"Good. 'Cause I've been waiting to see them in action."

Prince Lock rose from his seat, wings opening just enough to fill the room with drifting stardust.

"Prepare the Celestianites," Lock ordered.

"And tell them to move fast."

His eyes gleamed like twin eclipses.

"Midnight is near."

⊗ #1.30 — Conflict Rising ⊗

Duke landed hard on a distant mountain overlooking the Land of Hearts. His knees buckled. His hand shot to his chest—blood already spilling from his glowing, cracked heart.

That last hit from Krane and Overbrawl had wrecked him.

His neon heart flickered out of his chest, slipping through his fingers like glass. Duke snatched it mid-fall, voice breaking into a desperate whisper:

"No, no, no—don't die on me..."

He pressed it back into his chest, forcing it to pulse again, and slumped down right there on the mountaintop. Breathing ragged. Eyes distant.

The kingdom below shimmered under the night sky—soft pink towers glowing faint through the mist. The Blushinites were asleep. The whole world felt quiet... except inside Duke's head.

Way below him, trees stretched for miles, but nothing reached as high as this mountain.

He grabbed a rock and hurled it with all the fury in his body.

"They got the Power Gem!" he snapped, voice echoing off the cliffs.

The rock clanged off a tower and vanished into the dark.

Duke adjusted his mechanical suit, gritting his teeth, metal scraping against metal. Then... he pulled his heart out again. Staring down at it. Watching it flicker in his shaking hand.

A tear slipped from his eye.

"I'll do it... for the future," he whispered.

One Power Gem was still strapped to his side—the Intelligence Gem. But it wasn't enough. Nothing was.

Duke was fifteen now. But ever since he was twelve, since Lunaranites tore his life apart—parents gone, friends gone, everyone gone—it always circled back to one thing.

In the Lovely Palace at the Kingdom of Hearts

Oscar was awake.

Still up. 10 PM sharp. Way past when he should've knocked out. But here he was, wide-eyed in his room inside the castle, brain running laps.

His whole room? Pink. Walls, ceiling, even the bed. And all over those walls? Red heart-shaped pictures of Starla. Like, full shrine status. A soft lamp next to him lit up the whole place, casting everything in a cozy glow.

Oscar sat in his big royal pink bed, legs crossed, not even tired. On the red nightstand right next to him was his phone... and, of course, a framed picture of Starla with a heart on it.

He already knew why he couldn't sleep.

Starla.

The type of Celestianite girl that made his heart skip like five beats in a row. That's why he stayed loyal, always trying to be smooth, always trying to flirt—even though, let's be real, it

never worked when Scourge Don was around. Don was his boy and all, but that other version of Don? The dark one? The edgy menace?

That dude made Oscar question reality.

Why was Don so different sometimes?

Oscar lay back on his bed, eyes on the ceiling, Starla plushie clutched in one arm. His brain just kept running it over, again and again, like a broken record.

"What could make Don flip like that...?"

He stared into space for a second, then shrugged it off with a sigh:

"Eh. Maybe it was Incarceration."

At the Mountain Cave

Don sat in the dark cave, quiet, just... thinking.

Was Starla right?

He didn't know. Honestly, he couldn't tell if it was a yes or a no anymore. The only thing he really felt sure about was one thing:

Free will.

Or more like... the fact that his was gone.

Don knew deep down, clear as day, that he couldn't think for himself anymore. Couldn't even think for anyone else.

He was Scourge Don now. Said it a thousand times in his head. But this time? He really meant it. It wasn't just a phase.

And yet, somewhere in there, the real Don—the one buried under all that Scourge Don weight—he was still asking the question:

Why did it even start?

And he already knew.

It started when he left Ella. Ran into the forest.

That was the crack in the glass.

Don knew Olsen was still alive somewhere, injured bad but alive. He knew that for a fact. But he couldn't shake the real fear. The prophecy. He didn't want anything to do with it. That's why he ran. That's why he turned into... this.

But the weird thing was... ever since Scourge Don took over, the prophecy didn't scare him as much.

What scared him more...

Was himself.

The real Don sat there in the dark, thinking about the future. Imagining it. Would the world break apart because of him? Would he become the next Dark Don?

Would he?

Hopeless. That's what it felt like.

But then... maybe—just maybe—he could still choose.

Stay a Scourge Don...

Or stop one.

In the Forgotten Wizard's Domain

Near the table buried under leaning stacks of ancient books and softly bubbling vials, the crew stood in a loose, uneasy circle, all eyes locked on the potion Eldritch had brewed like it was some sacred artifact pulled straight out of myth.

The glass vial glowed faintly.

Kayson leaned in way too close, squinting through the round bottle. His stomach actually growled. "So let me get this straight," he muttered. "You're telling me you need *Leviathan*

meat and *Gadian Seawater* just to make this?"

Eldritch chuckled, slow and dusty, stroking his beard. "Correct, my fellow children. That is precisely how one brews the Oligirath Potion." He tapped the vial. "This concoction allows a person to turn *against* the negative versions of themselves."

Sophia's tiger tail shot straight up. "Whoa—hold on. 'Turn against'?? That does *not* sound reassuring."

Eldritch nodded like this was perfectly normal information. "It forces the user to confront and reject the worst parts of who they are. Fear. Shame. Self-loathing."

Sophia immediately set the bottle down like it might bite her. "Nope. We're not forcing Don to do anything. That's literally what Incarceration did to him."

Eldritch raised a finger, slow and dramatic. "Ah. Unfortunately, I do not possess recipes for psychological healing. That... is something only bonds and trust can mend."

The room went quiet.

That was the problem.

William's wings flared suddenly, the snap of air making Kai jump a foot back. Everyone looked around at each other, the realization settling in like a weight.

Eldritch shuffled away, passing between two towering bookshelves, then lowered himself into a creaking rocking chair like a man who had already said his piece. Beside him, a soft blue portal spun lazily, barely noticeable.

Angel crossed his arms and stepped closer. "Alright, old man. What are you *really* showing us?"

Eldritch smiled.

"I'm glad you asked."

He lifted his staff and drove it into the portal.

The energy rippled outward, the surface stretching and flat-

tening until it became a wide, shimmering window.

Celestia filled the air.

Golden towers. Radiant clouds. Celestianites moving through the streets like living starlight.

Then—

The image *shattered*.

Lunaranites poured in from every direction. Spears raised. Explosions ripped through the skyline. Celestianite guards burst from the castle in flashes of light, wings flaring as battle cries tore through the sky.

Buildings collapsed under radiant blasts.

A dragon-like Lunaranite commander—*not* Dreadixz—cut through defenders with terrifying ease, his blade flashing as bodies fell.

Jocabed staggered back. "What... what is this?!"

Panic snapped through the room.

"Where's Dark Don?" someone shouted.

They turned.

The space where he'd been standing was empty.

No footsteps. No portal flare. No goodbye.

Just a faint shimmer in the air—already fading—like something had passed through and didn't want to be noticed.

A chill crawled up Emely's spine.

"He was here," she said quietly.

No one answered.

Then—

BEEP BEEP BEEP.

Keyler's phone exploded with noise, the ringtone echoing off the stone walls. William flinched so hard his wings knocked a stack of books over.

Keyler answered fast.

"...Yeah?"

A pause.

His eyes narrowed.

"...What?"

Whatever he was hearing drained the color from his face.

The call ended.

He stared at the screen for a long second, then slid the phone back into his pocket. When he looked up, the jokes were gone. Entirely.

Voice low. Steady.

"The Officials just confirmed it," he said.

Everyone leaned in.

"Celestia's under attack."

⊗ #1.31 —Beasts ⊗

The sky had completely lost control.

Rain slammed into the Rufty Mountain flatlands in relentless sheets, flattening the world into smeared grays and blues. Thunder rolled overhead like massive war drums. Lightning kept ripping through the storm at uneven intervals, turning night into a flickering, unstable daylight that couldn't decide what it wanted to be.

The crew ran anyway.

Mud exploded under every step. Wind cut sideways across the mountains like it had teeth. Trees bent at impossible angles, some snapping clean, others just disappearing behind walls of rain. Entire ridgelines blurred out of existence as the storm swallowed distance itself.

Everyone was soaked. Everyone was exhausted. And nobody had the luxury of slowing down.

Mason led the charge, water flying off his jacket in sheets.

"Something was up!"

CRAAAAACK.

Lightning split the sky so hard it felt like the atmosphere itself cracked.

"No kidding Dark Don was gonna betray us eventually!" he shouted back.

Sophia wiped rain from her face mid-run, purple hair plastered down like it had given up resisting.

"Okay, cool—but does anybody actually know where Celestia is?!"

No answer.

Not because they were ignoring her.

Because nobody knew.

Angel pushed his glasses up, water streaming off the frames.

"I can't portal us there!"

A thunderclap detonated overhead, shaking the ridge.

"The prophecy rules are blocking everything!"

Another bolt struck a distant peak. The flash erased the landscape for half a second.

William slid up beside Sophia, barely keeping pace.

"It would be really great if somebody could—"

BOOOOOOOOM.

Thunder swallowed the rest.

"—THINK OF SOMETHING!"

They surged over a ridge—

And all at once, stopped.

Boots skidded through mud. Bodies nearly collapsed forward.

Ahead of them stretched a river.

Except it wasn't a river.

It was an ocean trying to behave like one.

Dark, violent water churned beneath the storm, waves smashing against jagged banks like they were angry at the land for existing. The current looked strong enough to erase entire structures. Beyond it, the horizon opened into something worse.

The Unknown Sea.

No maps. No routes. No stories that ended well.

Just endless water pretending it had somewhere to go.

Angel squinted through rain-smeared lenses.

Lightning flashed.

His eyes widened.

Then—

A grin.

"I GOT IT!"

Before anyone could process that sentence, he was already sprinting.

"ANGEL, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!"

Answer: wood acquisition.

He grabbed a fallen tree and shoved it toward the river like it owed him money.

Javier caught on instantly.

His eyes lit up—Control Element activating.

WHOOOOM.

Logs lifted into the air, spinning through rain like they weighed nothing. One after another, they dropped into the river, splashing hard as they began forming a shaky, uneven path.

Angel pointed like he was presenting a masterpiece.

"We'll use them as a raft!"

Thunder cracked again like the sky was judging him personally.

Nobody had a better idea.

Then—

RRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH.

The roar rolled across the mountains.

Everything stopped.

Even the storm felt like it hesitated.

The rain suddenly felt colder.

The river looked less like water and more like it was reconsidering its life choices.

Lightning flashed across the horizon.

A silhouette stood in the dark.

Huge.

Watching.

Another flash.

A second shape appeared.

Then a third.

One ahead of them.

One behind.

One too close for comfort on the river's edge.

The crew froze instantly.

Angel jumped onto the half-built raft.

"No standing around! MOVE!"

He pointed at it like panic was a navigation system.

"COME ON!"

Jocabed stared at him.

"You think THAT thing is getting us to Celestia?"

Sophia snorted once.

"It'll get us there in about a thousand years."

RRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHH.

Closer.

Not metaphorically.

Closer.

Lightning flashed again.

The silhouettes shifted.

Then moved.

Another flash.

They were closer.

Another flash.

Closer again.

Closer still.

Then they stepped out fully.

Griorgriffons.

Stone-gray bodies like carved mountains that learned how to breathe. Massive frames, built wrong in a way that still worked. Parallelogram-shaped heads lined with jagged spikes. Arms too small for their size, tails too long for their balance.

Their eyes were black.

No pupils.

No emotion.

Just absence.

And their mouths—

Way too many teeth.

Like evolution had a personal vendetta.

Sophia's expression changed instantly.

All humor gone.

"Don't."

A pause.

Lightning flashed.

"Move."

Nobody did.

The creatures circled slowly, heavy footsteps splashing through mud with unsettling patience.

One leaned in toward Mason.

Sniffed.

Another stopped in front of Javier.

A third walked right past William like he wasn't even there.

Then—

Its tail snapped sideways.

WHACK.

William got smacked clean across the face.

He didn't move afterward.

Just stood there.

Rain hitting him.

One tear mixing in like it belonged.

Lonnie's eyes screamed at him:

Do NOT react. We all die if you react.

The Griorgriffons kept circling.

Waiting.

Testing.

Then—

They stopped.

Lifted their heads.

Turned away.

Started walking off.

Relief hit instantly.

Three seconds of peace.

Then—

"AHHHHHHHHHH-CHOOOOOOOOOOO!"

Silence.

The entire world froze.

Every head turned slowly.

Keyler stood there, frozen mid-sneeze like reality itself had betrayed him.

Sophia slowly turned toward him.

"...Keyler."

That tone alone was a warning.

The Griorgriffons froze too.

Heads snapped back.

Jaws opened wider than nature intended.

"...I SWEAR TO EVERYTHING."

RRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!

The first one charged.

Everything exploded.

The battlefield ignited in chaos.

Mason transformed mid-motion.

"YOU'RE BUYING ME LIKE SEVENTY DOUGHNUTS FOR THIS!"

Keyler bolted backward.

"IT'S NOT MY FAULT!"

Spider legs burst from his back as he screamed, "I HAVE GRIORGRIFFON ALLERGIES!"

Jocabed hit first.

BOOOOOOOOM.

Blizzard Fox form slammed into the creature, launching it through a hillside. Rock detonated outward as it disappeared into terrain.

Before it could recover—

Emely dropped in from above.

Ice Bird form cutting through rain like a blade.

She didn't slow down.

Didn't hesitate.

She struck.

Freezing energy engulfed the beast midair. Ice raced across its body in branching patterns—

CRACK.

It shattered into glittering fragments.

The second Griorgriffon reacted instantly.

It grabbed Jocabed mid-recovery.

Pinned her.

Slammed her into the mud hard enough to shake the ground.

Kwa'asja rolled in—Armadillo form spinning like a living

wrecking ball.

The creature caught her.

Paused.

Then threw her like she was nothing.

She disappeared into the distance screaming.

"AAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHH!"

WHAM.

Gone.

Keyler lunged—

Got kicked so hard he briefly became atmospheric data.

William transformed mid-air.

Massive wings erupted.

Lightning flashed behind him like a spotlight.

He dove.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

Each hit deeper.

Faster.

Blood mixing with rain.

The beast roared.

William accelerated.

WHOOOOOOOM.

Final strike—

His beak pierced through its chest.

It collapsed.

Dead.

Third one lunged.

Sophia was already there.

Tiger form activated.

She landed on its back, sank her teeth in, and spun.

The creature turned into a screaming, unwilling cyclone of violence.

Mud exploded outward.

Fedjina descended like a burning meteor.

Fire wrapped around her—

Impact—

The Griorgriffon caught her mid-drop.

Used her as a projectile.

She vanished into Sophia.

Both screams overlapped in chaos.

Mason returned in Doughnut Bear form.

Very angry.

He grabbed the creature's skull.

Lifted it.

And slammed it into the ground hard enough to carve a crater.

BOOOOOOOOM.

Lonnie followed through in Forest Fawn form—clean kick sending it tumbling.

Javier's quills fired.

Hundreds of shots.

The beast became a pincushion of pain.

Mason followed up with an uppercut that launched it skyward.

Kayson appeared overhead.

Two fists.

WHAM.

It slammed back into the ground.

Then—

A portal opened beneath it.

Angel adjusted his glasses calmly.

It vanished.

Mason blinked.

"...Where'd it go?"

Angel shrugged.

"Lava pit in Scarletsville."

Beat.

"Nice place."

Silence returned.

Rain kept falling like nothing had changed.

Nobody celebrated.

Nobody had energy left for it.

Ryan leaned against a boulder, half-wrapped in bandages.

"How are we supposed to reach Celestia if Angel can't even portal us?"

No answer.

Jocabed lay nearby in Fox form.

Barely breathing.

Too still.

Keyler collapsed into the mud.

"I'm done."

Everyone looked wrecked.

Fedjina's wings were torn. Mason was bruised everywhere. Sophia's headphones were cracked. Even Angel looked like the idea of standing was optional now.

Then Sophia slowly stood.

Rain dripping from her headphones.

She stared toward the distant Forgotten Wizard's Domain.

Miles away.

A voice suddenly echoed through the storm.

"EVERYONE!"

Everyone froze.

Eldritch.

Far away.

Too far to be normal.

"YOU COULD'VE JUST USED THE PORTALS, YOU KNOW!!"

A pause.

Then—

"NOW GET TO CELESTIA!"

Silence hit again.

Nobody moved.

Nobody spoke.

Mason slowly looked up.

Sophia buried her face in her hands.

Ryan groaned like his soul left early.

Angel adjusted his glasses like this was somehow his fault.

And the entire crew released the single most exhausted sigh the Rufty Mountains had ever heard.

At the Kingdom of Hearts

Duke clutched his arm as sparks spilled from the damaged cybernetics, flickering like a dying circuit trying to stay alive. One of his wings sagged, misaligned, armor plates cracked and hanging loose. With a strained exhale, the entire system finally gave up—detaching in chunks and crashing into the dirt in a heavy, metallic collapse.

For a moment, there was nothing underneath the tech.

Then neon green flared out from his body like something finally unchained.

"That's enough warm-ups," Duke said flatly. Ice in his tone. "Playtime's over."

Energy curled around his fists like living smoke, twisting and tightening with every breath he took. "I'm done pretending you

can keep up."

Starla shifted back, breathing uneven, but her glare didn't break. It stayed locked—burning through pain.

"Oh?" Duke tilted his head slightly, almost amused. "Still staring at me?"

He raised his cannon lazily.

"Okay."

Starla moved first.

She sprinted forward, astral fire igniting around her fists as she closed the distance in a straight line of heat and intent.

Duke fired.

The blast hit her mid-charge.

Point-blank.

No hesitation.

The impact erased momentum instantly and launched her through a building, then another, then another—each collision blooming into a chain of explosions that lit up the skyline in violent flashes.

Silence followed the trail of destruction.

Starla lay in a crater, smoke curling off her body in weak flickers of light that struggled to stay lit.

Duke leveled his cannon again.

"Stay down already—"

A sonic boom tore the sky open.

His head snapped upward.

Too late.

A figure dropped through the storm like gravity itself had finally gotten angry.

Wrapped in dark violet energy, falling too fast to be natural. The Blushinites below froze mid-fight, staring upward like they didn't know whether to pray or run.

It wasn't a star.

It was pressure.

It was punishment.

The impact hit Duke dead-on.

BOOOOM.

The collision detonated across the battlefield, shockwaves flattening terrain, collapsing towers, and cracking distant mountain ridges like glass under stress.

Duke was thrown back, cannon skidding across broken stone.

And standing over him now—

Scourge Don.

Mask fractured. Aura heavy. Claws like obsidian pulled straight out of something that shouldn't exist in daylight.

"Touch her again," Don said quietly, voice stripped of warmth, "and I'll peel the wings off you."

Duke laughed through blood at the corner of his mouth.

"Bro..." he coughed, smirking. "Look in a mirror. You're one bad day away from becoming the villain of your own story."

Don stepped forward and pressed a boot into his chest.

"No," he said. "Right now, I'm the thing stopping you."

Scorch dropped beside Starla with a low snarl, guarding her as she forced herself upright through sheer refusal to stay down.

Duke wiped blood from his lip and grinned wider.

"You're all addicted to hope," he said. "That's what makes it so easy to steal your futures."

He exploded upward.

Neon fist charging.

Straight for Don.

Don didn't move.

He caught the punch with one hand.

The impact detonated outward—shockwave ripping across

the battlefield, shaking everything in range.

Don's eyes flashed.

Then his free hand snapped forward.

A brutal strike slammed into Duke's jaw and launched him sideways before Don followed instantly—blitzing through him with a sequence that didn't leave space to breathe.

Left. Right. Overhand. Spin kick.

Then a dropkick that sent Duke smashing through multiple towers in a single line of destruction.

Stone rained like debris from a collapsing world.

Duke rose from the rubble, neon flaring brighter now—anger overriding damage.

"KNEEL TO THE NEON!"

They shot at each other again.

Mid-air collision.

BOOM.

The shockwave rippled across the Land of Hearts, bending clouds and cracking the air itself like it couldn't handle the pressure anymore.

Starla climbed onto Scorch's back, the beast launching into the air with her as rain sliced sideways like broken glass.

Above them, Don and Duke turned the sky into a battlefield.

Two comets of violence trading control of the horizon.

Don twisted mid-flight—axe kick.

Duke got launched, then immediately recovered—flash-kicking Don in the chin and grabbing him mid-air before momentum could settle.

As they dropped together, Duke shouted through grit and rage:

"YOU HAVE THE WRONG MINDSET!"

They hit the ground like a falling execution.

BOOOOM.

Dust rolled outward for miles.

Duke stood first, dragging Don up by the throat, moonlight and neon mixing across their silhouettes like opposing worlds.

"End of the road," Duke growled.

His fist lit up.

He slammed Don in the face.

Then again.

Then launched him upward like artillery fire.

Teleport flash.

He appeared mid-air, striking Don from multiple angles in rapid succession—each hit snapping sound out of existence for a split second.

Don was launched across regions like a broken projectile.

Scarletsville.

Thunderstark.

Above the Gadian Sea.

Then back down—crashing into earth hard enough to carve a crater that swallowed silence with it.

Stillness.

Mask fractured.

Blood dripping.

No movement.

Duke landed beside him.

And for the first time, something changed.

Don's hand moved.

He tore the silver cannon off Duke's arm in one clean motion—metal screaming, wires snapping, sparks bursting into the rain.

Then he crushed it between his hands until the energy inside it died completely.

A silver Power Gem slipped free.

Don stepped forward.

Then—

Voices cut through the storm.

Olsen. Prince. Demaurion. Archie. Ella. Eli.

"Don," Olsen called, steady but shaking underneath it. "Come with us... or you'll fall apart alone. We need the Gems. We need you."

He stepped closer.

"I was your first friend," he said. "That didn't stop being true."

Silence hit like weight.

Inside Don's mind, something fought.

Scratching. Slamming. Drowning behind a wall it couldn't break through.

Was there even a point left?

Don turned away.

No answer.

Just motion.

His cape dragged through the dirt behind him like something mourning its own owner.

As he walked, Power Gems slipped loose from torn fabric—cyan, pink, black—falling one after another into the storm-soaked ground.

Duke's eyes locked onto them instantly.

No hesitation.

He moved.

A neon blink.

The Gems vanished with him as he scooped them up and disappeared into the sky, tucking them beneath his wings before the light collapsed back into nothing.

Four Gems now.

Back at the cave, Starla curled around her three recovered

Gems, barely conscious, rain and dust clinging to her fur and armor. Scorch sat beside her, silent, watchful, like a guard that didn't believe in comfort.

She stared out at Don's silhouette fading into the storm.

"...Think he's gonna make it?" she whispered.

Scorch didn't answer.

Just lowered his head.

⊗ #1.32 — Raging ⊗

The portal detonated.

Blue light ripped the sky apart like someone tore a hole in reality with bare hands. A shockwave blasted outward, glass shattered, banners disintegrated, flames bent sideways, and Class 101 got YEETED out of the rift like the universe rejected them.

They hit stone hard.

Golden towers folded in on themselves like dying stars. Fire clawed up marble pillars. The sky bled orange through a suffocating veil of smoke. Every breath tasted like metal and ash.

Kwa'asja blinked.

"...Why does the ground feel loud?" she muttered, half-asleep, and an energy spear SCREAMED past her ear, splitting the bridge behind her into molten cracks.

Emely grabbed her collar and yanked her forward.

"Because that was almost your obituary. MOVE."

Anhia gasped as a chunk of flaming debris skidded toward her pristine boots.

"Oh absolutely not."

She vaulted over it with elegant precision, landing perfectly, then stared at the ash speck on her sleeve like it had personally

betrayed her.

"This city is RUDE."

Mason tore past them, shoulder-checking a falling beam out of the way.

"I TOLD YOU DARK DON WAS OFF!"

He pointed toward the skyline where lunar energy flashed like corrupted lightning. "You don't 'accidentally' glow evil!"

Sophia ducked as a cannon blast vaporized the air above her head. Dust rained into her hair.

She stood back up, jaw tight.

"Okay. Cool. So today's a war."

On the bridge ahead, Celestianite and Lunaranite forces collided like tectonic plates. Spears flashed silver. Cannons boomed. Bodies flew. The bridge cracked in spiderweb fractures beneath the strain.

William cupped his hands around his mouth.

"We push through or we die here! There is no 'wait and see'!"

A roar cut him off.

A massive Lunaranite crashed down in front of them, crater forming beneath its feet. Its armor smoked. Its eyes burned violet.

Emely didn't hesitate.

Her hand snapped forward.

Ice exploded outward in a jagged arc, the creature froze mid-lunge, its roar crystallizing in its throat, then shattered into glittering shards that skidded across the bridge.

She exhaled hard.

"Next."

That's when they saw them.

A tidal wave of black-and-purple armored Lunaranites flooding toward them. Blasters charging. Spears raised. War banners

ripping in the heat.

Sophia's golden eyes sharpened.

She grabbed Angel's arm.

"...Why are you looking at me like that?" Angel asked.

Sophia didn't blink.

Her arms flared with vibrating yellow-pink sound energy, humming like a rising engine.

Angel's eyes widened.

"Sophia, wait—"

Too late.

She LAUNCHED him skyward.

He spiraled up, dark blue energy trailing behind him like comet smoke.

"CREATE A DOMAIN!" Sophia roared.

Angel flailed midair.

"WHY DO YOU SAY THINGS LIKE THAT WITH ZERO CONTEXT?!"

"You wanna get skewered or you wanna get legendary?!"

Angel glanced down.

The bridge. The fire. The wave of enemies.

He adjusted his glasses.

"...Fine. But if this implodes I'm blaming you in the afterlife."

The wind shifted.

Then it snapped.

Dark blue energy spiraled outward from Angel in violent rings. The sky twisted like fabric being wrung out. Portals flickered open around him in chaotic orbit.

"VORTEX DOMAIN!"

The air collapsed inward.

A massive gravitational rift formed above the battlefield, a churning sphere of dark blue distortion. Wind howled. Smoke

ripped upward. Lunaranites staggered as gravity betrayed them.

Sophia slammed her palm to the bridge.

A shockwave of concentrated sound detonated outward — bright yellow and pink — launching the entire class forward like a human missile.

They flew.

Over fire.

Over collapsing rooftops.

Over a city dying in slow motion.

Kwa'asja yawned midair.

Anhia clutched her robes in horror.

"If this stains I am actually suing someone."

Below them —

The Enchanted Kingdom burned.

At the center of it all —

Jaylen.

And Dark Don.

They collided like rival suns. Lunar energy crashed against blazing Celestian force. Every strike cracked the air. Every impact sent ripples across the broken city.

Behind Dark Don —

Incarceration stood like a conductor of chaos, summoning grotesque shadow-beasts that tore through Celestian ranks without hesitation.

Class 101 landed hard in front of the Officials, boots scraping across fractured gold stone.

Dark Don turned slowly.

Lunar energy crawled over his armor. Silver eyes glowing. Blood streaked his jaw — not weakness.

Trophy.

He smirked.

"Well. Reinforcements. That's adorable."

Coltz stepped forward, green energy erupting around his fists.

"Drop the villain monologue. You lost the right to dramatic pauses."

Dark Don tilted his head.

"You think this is drama?"

He raised a hand. The sky flickered violet.

"This is efficiency."

Guervens limped forward, magma flaring around cracked wings.

"When was the last time you fought without stacking the deck?"

Dark Don's grin widened.

"I don't play fair."

His voice lowered, colder than space.

"Fairness is a luxury for people who weren't broken first."

Silence.

Battle roaring around them.

Jaylen's energy flared brighter. Yellow and cyan spiraled around his arms.

Dark Don looked past them, almost bored.

"Celestial Pillars will activate soon. Power Gems will surface. And when they do..."

He shrugged.

"They'll come to me."

He wiped blood from his lip with his thumb.

"Deal with the small ones."

He vanished in a flash of lunar distortion.

The Lunaranites surged forward.

Class 101 didn't flinch.

Elements ignited. Beast forms roared into existence. Energy

tore through smoke and fire.

Jaylen cracked his neck, stepping into the front line.

"Alright," he said, voice steady despite the inferno around them.

"Let's remind them whose sky this is."

At the Wrecked Kingdom of Hearts

Don dragged the night with him.

His ragged platform shoes scraped against fractured marble, skrrrkk... skrrrkk... thick soles cracked, fabric torn, laces half-burned and snapping loose in the wind.

Each step hit heavy, THUD... THUD... elevated by those battered platforms, like he was forcing himself to stand taller than the shame trying to fold him in half.

The sky above the Land of Hearts was layered like torn animation cels. Smoke drifted in violent ribbons, lightning streaked sideways in jagged KRRRZZZKT! slashes across ash-choked clouds. The moon glared down, sterile and merciless, bleaching the world in bone-white light. Every fracture in the earth, every scorch mark across Don's armor, every twitch in his shoulders, exposed.

His cape whipped behind him, FWHAPP FWHAPP FWHAPP! shredded ends snapping like broken wings. Dark Celestial energy leaked from his back in slow, liquid tendrils, violet-black ribbons curling and uncoiling like living ink in water. They didn't glow cleanly.

They pulsed.

Thrum. Thrum. Thrum.

Out of sync.

Craters breathed molten orange. Bridges sagged. Towers leaned inward like exhausted giants.

Above, Duke hovered, thrusters humming a low mechanical MMMMMMMRRRR, neon optics scanning the six figures still upright in the smoke.

Still watching Don.

"Tch."

He descended, VVVRRSHH, and let the Power Gems fall from his grip.

Clink. Clink. Clink.

They rolled across ash, glowing faintly.

Engines flared.

VRRRRRROOOOOOM!

And Duke vanished into the storm without another word.

Silence dropped like a curtain.

"Don!"

Olsen's voice cracked through the smoke.

Don stopped.

The ash spiraled around him, caught in the gravity of his dark aura.

He turned.

Violet fractures crawled across his armor like lightning trapped beneath glass. Energy bled from the cracks in smoky spirals, thin at first, then thicker, coiling around his arms, his neck, his face.

His eyes burned purple.

"What," he asked softly, "do you want me to ruin now?"

Olsen stepped forward anyway.

"We're not whole without you."

Don laughed.

Short.

Sharp.

Hah.

"Then maybe the prophecy miscalculated."

The air collapsed inward.

Then exploded.

WHOOOOOOOM!

Dark Celestial energy detonated from him in concentric rings. The ground spiderwebbed, KRRRRAAACK, fractures racing outward like ink across paper.

"You ever feel that shift?" Don's voice sharpened, rising. "That microsecond when everyone adjusts their expectations downward?"

The earth buckled again, CRAAACK.

"I cracked once," he snapped. "Once. And now I'm the liability."

The sky flickered purple.

"I'm not doing that again."

He vanished.

POP.

"50-50-50 CELESTIAL DROPKICK!"

Ella barely gasped before one of those battered platform soles drove into her gut. The impact exploded outward in a violent ring, BOOOOOM, rock vaporizing, debris spiraling in slow motion as she tore through a boulder.

Prince turned.

Too slow.

Don blinked beneath him.

WHAM!

An uppercut launched Prince skyward, lightning bursting from his wings in wild forks, ZZZKRAAAK, electricity crawling uncontrolled over the sky.

Don teleported above him mid-ascent.

His tail scythed downward.

KATHOOOOOM!

Prince cratered the earth, lightning scattering like shattered glass.

"No cheers?" Don's voice ripped through the wind. "No applause? GOOD."

Archie erupted forward.

His orange flames roared like a living solar storm. Fire spiraled upward in corkscrew towers, FWOOOOOOSH, tongues snapping and cracking in radiant bursts. Sparks flared like embers in zero gravity, swirling around him as his eyes burned molten gold.

"You don't get to rewrite us!" Archie shouted, voice vibrating through the heat.

Don caught his wrist.

SSSSSHHHHHT!

Fire wrapped around Don's arm, sizzling against dark energy that hissed back like it had teeth. Violet tendrils coiled around Archie's flame, swallowing brightness, dimming it by degrees.

"You always grin when it's your turn," Don murmured.

He pivoted.

KRAAASH!

Archie smashed through a collapsed archway, orange fire scattering in streaks like brushstrokes across the night.

Eli blinked in.

Time fractured.

The world stuttered, TIK... TIK... TIKTIKTIK.

Afterimages of Eli layered over each other, each movement leaving ghost trails, pale cyan clock sigils spinning behind him. He struck, rewind, struck again, rewind, reality snapping back like elastic.

Don stepped forward into the distortion.

He moved between frames.

Grabbed Eli mid-phase.

THUD!

Kicked him through a leaning tower.

RRRRRAAAAM!

Stone folded inward in jagged chunks.

"STOP FREEZING ME IN YOUR WORST FRAME!"

Demaurion roared, water spiraling around his arms into a compressed helix. The liquid glowed deep ocean-blue, pressure lines vibrating across its surface like spinning turbines.

He fired.

SHHHHHRRRAAAAAAAM!

The beam carved across the battlefield, slicing trenches, steam detonating upward in violent clouds, PSHHHHHHT.

Through the white mist.

Don walked.

Platform shoes scraping.

skrrk... skrrk...

Water tore across his armor, sizzling, SSSSSHHHHHTTT, dark energy bleeding through the cracks like ink dissolving in rain.

He lunged.

Grabbed Demaurion by the throat.

Spun once.

Threw him into Olsen.

BOOOOOM!

They skidded across fractured ground, carving twin scars.

Don landed before them, aura spiraling violently now, not smooth ribbons, but jagged arcs snapping outward like broken neon, ZZZZT ZZZZT.

"You keep getting up," he said, breathing hard. "Why? To confirm I'm unstable?"

They answered.

Archie surged again, FWOOM!

Demaurion's water coiled, SHHHH!

Prince's lightning detonated, KRAK-BOOM!

Ella's sand spiraled razor sharp, SHHHK-TKTKTKTK!

Eli's time sigils flared brighter, concentric rings rotating backward, forward, sideways.

They hit him together.

A collision of color.

Orange. Blue. Gold. Tan. Cyan.

The air went white.

For half a second.

He staggered.

THRAAAAAAAAAM!

The explosion tore the battlefield open. Shockwaves rippled outward in visible rings, distorting the horizon like heat haze. Trees ripped from the earth. Towers folded midair. The sky cracked with a thunderclap that wasn't weather.

Don blurred.

He didn't teleport.

He jittered between frames.

Flash-kick, Ella down. WHAM!

Backhand, Prince airborne. CRACK!

Elbow, Archie flattened. THUD!

Above him, ten colossal celestial fists formed, not smooth constructs, but swirling masses of silver-white plasma shot through with black lightning. They rotated slowly, grinding into shape with a low crushing hum.

RRRRRRRRMMMMMMMM.

"Three hundred and sixty-five days!" Don screamed, voice shredding.

The fists dropped.

KA-THOOOOOM! KA-THOOOOOM! KA-THOOOOOM!

Each impact bent the land inward.

Wind blasted outward in violent rings.

The Land of Hearts buckled.

When dust thinned.

Olsen was still rising.

Don descended slowly.

Platform soles touched ground.

THUD.

He pinned Olsen down, corrupted energy lashing outward like living fear, snapping in jagged arcs around them.

"WHY?" Don roared, voice breaking. "Why trust anyone when I can see the shift in your eyes?"

His hands trembled.

"I LEFT ONCE!" he shouted. "Why come back just to fail in high definition?!"

Olsen coughed.

Blood at his lip.

He smiled anyway.

"Because," he said quietly, "best friends don't run analytics on each other."

Everything slowed.

The wind softened.

Archie's flames dimmed to a low glow.

Eli's time rings slowed their spin.

Demaurion's water fell in droplets.

"We've been friends seven years," Olsen continued. "You were my first friend. I don't care if you fall. I care if you vanish."

Don's foot trembled.

"...You're not laughing?" he whispered.

Olsen shook his head.

A tear cut down Don's cheek.

The violet fractures splintered.

CRK... CRK... SHATTER.

Dark Celestial energy fragmented into drifting particles, dissolving into the air like dying stars.

His shoulders collapsed.

The mask fell.

He stepped back.

Then forward—

And fell into them.

They caught him.

His voice small.

"I hate being watched."

Archie's reply was soft but steady. "Good. We're not your audience."

Behind them, the Power Gems began to hum.

Low.

mmmmmmmm.

Then louder.

MMMMMMMMMM.

They lifted into the air, radiance intensifying — prismatic beams slicing through the clouds. Colors spiraled together into a radiant halo.

Starla gasped. "They're synchronizing."

The Gems rotated faster — faster — until they blurred into a ring of orbiting stars.

WHOOOOOOOOOOM!

A rainbow shockwave detonated across Avangard. Mountains echoed. Forests bent.

The blue Gem drifted to the center, spinning like the eye of a cosmic storm.

The wind howled.

"Brace!" Demaurion shouted.

The Gems collided.

KRAAAAAAAAAASH!

Light ripped through the sky.

The ground split open.

Lunaranites burst upward — BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! — armor gleaming. Uragas twisted midair, frames snapping and reshaping into mechanical hover-jets with grinding jaws — CLANK-CHRRRKK! — cannons charging with neon pulses.

The sky filled.

Chaos returned.

Don lifted his head.

Violet-white Celestial energy ignited across his scales — flames burning clean and bright. Wings burst open behind him with a violent crack of displaced air.

KRAAASH!

He shot upward, platform shoes slicing through wind as if gravity itself hesitated.

Below, Lunaranites scattered as he tore through them in streaks of silver light, precise, surgical, relentless.

Not rage.

Clarity.

His team surged beneath him, orange fire, blue water, golden lightning, spiraling sand, bending time, a storm of Elements carving toward Celestia.

Don hovered for one breath.

The storm dimmed around him.

Inside.

He felt the pull.

Cold.

Patient.

King Dreadixz.

Predator in moonlight.

Don flexed his claws.

"This one's mine."

Not ego.

Not fear.

Decision.

He turned toward the distant continent of Foreshade.

And vanished into the storm.

His friends looked up just long enough to catch the fire in his eyes—a mixture of fury, fear, and heartbreak. Olsen's fist clenched in the clouds, Archie's flames flickered with hesitation, Ella's wings shivered, and Prince's lightning sputtered for a brief second. They knew.

The swarm below didn't stand a chance. The storm swallowed him, light and chaos streaking across Avangard as he tore through Lunaranites like a living comet. Yet beneath every strike, every flash of celestial fire, the weight of that alone fight pressed heavier than any enemy.

The battlefield screamed with light, fury, and power, but somewhere in the tempest, Don's heart knew the next storm would be his alone: the face-to-face reckoning with King Dreadixz.

IV

PART FOUR

THE GREAT WAR OF CELESTIA TO THE END

| #1.33 — Battle of the Kings |

I cut through the stormfront like a blade, wings fully flared, lightning snapping off my armor and scattering across the clouds. The sky was a battlefield of black and blue, and beneath me, a million alien birds surged upward, a living shadow blotting out the horizon.

Their leader screeched.

I didn't react. My expression didn't move an inch.

I drew in a slow breath. The air tasted like ionized metal.

Celestial fire burned behind my eyes.

Enough.

A beam erupted from my palms, clean and surgical, slicing the storm in half from horizon to horizon. One bird disintegrated instantly, violet ash scattering like shattered glass across the thunderclouds.

I folded my wings and dropped.

The swarm rushed me, but I was already past them, daggers drawn. Their edges were white-hot and burned with layered celestial glyphs. Every swing left a radiant afterimage, trails of energy spiraling like comet tails across the sky. I carved through them with precise, lethal arcs. No wasted motion. No hesitation.

One creature lunged from below. I rotated through the air, severed its jaw, and planted a kick that sent its corpse spinning

into the storm. Another dove at my back. I snapped my wrist and hurled a dagger through its skull. It detonated in a bloom of violet fire that lit the clouds like a dying sun.

A whistle cut through the air, sharp and commanding.

My blades ripped free from the falling bodies, magnetized to my hands and locking into my grip with a metallic shout.

The entire flock collapsed onto me at once.

I didn't flinch.

My aura ignited, turning my silhouette into a streaking comet. I plunged into them, cutting through bone and wing like cosmic shrapnel. Each strike left shockwaves rippling through the storm, and the sky shook with every clash of steel and flesh.

Then I stopped mid-flight and crossed my arms.

Violet fire spiraled up both blades, chains of celestial energy wrapping around my arms like divine restraints. My eyes burned white, the KX sigil pulsing across my chestplate.

"Alien creatures are aboutta rain."

Teleportation cracked the air, a violent displacement that shattered the nearest clouds. I appeared in front of one beast and split it clean down the center. Before its halves even fell, I was behind another, dragging a dagger down its spine.

Then another.

Then another.

My movements blurred into thunder, an eruption of steel, teleportation flashes, and violet flame tearing the sky apart.

But I needed more.

The finale.

I shot upward, piercing the cloud layer in a burst of white heat. Above the storm, the world was silent. There was only me, the wind, and the glow of my weapons burning like twin stars.

I folded my legs, pointed myself downward, and fell.

"VIOLET—"

The air screamed. My armor glowed molten. Clouds shredded around me.

"INSANITY."

Impact.

The energy dome of the explosion tore the storm in half. Light swallowed the sky. Everything within a mile vanished, vaporized into drifting, inky rain. Feathers, ash, and smoke spiraled through the air like the remains of a fallen world.

I stood, breathing steadily, surrounded by the silence I had carved out of destruction.

The flock was gone.

Far below, Foreshade stretched across the ocean like a dead god's remains. Black towers twisted upward, and purple sigils crawled across cracked obsidian walls. The air around it felt wrong, heavy and ancient. The forest surrounding the island was nothing but splintered stumps and gray ash, as if life itself refused to stay.

And at the center, chained with links thicker than trees, stood the castle.

A fortress built to keep something in.

I shot downward in a smear of violet and slammed onto the far end of the bridge. Stone screamed beneath my palm as celestial energy snapped and sparked around me. I slowly pushed myself to my feet, fists clenched and wings flaring wide.

The bridge stretched ahead, empty.

My eyes crackled with light.

Then the sky broke.

Lunaranites dropped from above, armor clanging as they hit the stone in perfect formation. Spears locked. Shields raised. Wings spread. A living wall between me and the entrance.

One of them stepped forward.

I grinned.

"Yeah," I said, rolling my shoulders. "Came in just in time for y'all's ass whupping."

I launched.

A streak of celestial light tore across the bridge. My feet barely touched stone, just thundered blurs. Arms back. Daggers spinning. Vision sharpened to pure motion.

They surged at me like a flock of black birds.

I leapt, hit, rolled.

Celestial blasts fired mid-motion, detonating through the air and ripping them out of the sky.

One flashed in front of me.

"Too slow."

I kicked him away, flipped over a spear, and hurled a spinning dagger.

BOOM.

The explosion rippled across the entire bridge.

I flipped through the blast, hit the ground running, snatched my dagger mid-sprint, energy snapping around my legs as I swerved hard to the side.

Bullets tore past.

I blinked.

Flashed.

Dragged a hand along the stone, sparks screaming as my legs became spinning rings of light.

I tornado-kicked straight through a Lunaranite, sending his helmet flying.

I landed in the middle of the crowd.

Bad place for them.

I spun.

Daggers danced, slashes, stabs, clean arcs of light. Bodies dropped around me before they even realized they were hit.

Celestial energy whipped like a blade.

I flipped back, kicked one skyward, twisted midair, and sliced two more down before I even touched the ground.

I rolled, breakdanced through their legs, kicked them apart.

Then I leapt.

Energy wrapped around me, compressing into a blazing celestial sphere. I tore through the remaining Lunaranites in rapid slashes, brushstrokes of light, then shot straight up into the sky.

Explosions thundered behind me.

I dropped.

Landed hard in front of the entrance as the bridge erupted in celestial fire, cracks splitting the air itself.

Silence.

I stood, twirled my daggers once, and looked up at the portcullis.

"Your move," I muttered.

I narrowed my eyes.

My wings tightened.

"Locked portcullis," I said under my breath. "My favorite."

I stepped forward, violet flames gathering at my heels.

Time to break them.

"CELESTIAL STRIKE!"

WHAM.

It detonated outward in a blast of celestial force as I stepped in. One eye sliced through the smoke and chaos; energy danced across my suit, licking off like flames. My dragon hoodie hung heavy on my shoulders, the tail of fabric swaying behind me as I walked into the castle.

Darkness swallowed the room except for the streak of a blood-red rug and purple-torched sconces lining the stone floor. Rain hammered at the arched windows, a steady percussion from the storm outside. I felt the ozone in my teeth. My fingers curled around my twin daggers, violet lightning crawling along their blades, and there he was on the throne: King Dreadixz.

He'd dressed for the occasion, cape draped just so, helmet sharpened, armor gleaming like he'd spent too long staring at his reflection. A long silver sword hummed at his side, braided with black and purple energy. When he looked up, his eyes were knives. His wings spread slow; his tail thudded against the stone like a metronome of menace. He smirked, a sound that filled the hall.

"What can I say? Not everyone makes an entrance. It's a once-in-a-lifetime thing, KX." His voice rolled out, amused.

"Thanks for using my hero name. Appreciate the formality." I let the sarcasm drip. He chuckled, and it sounded like metal grinding.

He rose, throne creaking, and the metallic click of his boots came alive as lightning stabbed the sky and lit the room in a single white flash. Black and purple sparks braided around his Eclipse Sword as he walked toward me.

"You're fighting a figure way past your own blood, older than your hair follicles," he said, twirling the blade like a prize.

My wings flared. My tail lashed. I kept walking, dagger twirling between my fingers, a show of calm I didn't entirely feel. I shoved my hands into my pockets, flicked the daggers free, and tossed them. They spun, caught midair, and settled at my hips. Celestial energy hummed under my skin.

"I fought to get here," I said, landing in my stance. "And I'm finishing what I was destined to finish."

He raised his sword.

I grinned.

"You ready?" he asked, voice low.

"Born ready."

He shot forward—a blur of ancient armor and swirling void energy—spinning his sword overhead before dropping into a mid-air flip. The Eclipse Blade came down like a guillotine made of pure nightmare, slamming into the crossed X of my daggers. The impact didn't just boom—

it tore the air open.

A shockwave rippled out in a ring of violet and black, ripping the torches off the walls and blasting both of us back like ragdolls launched from cannons.

I hit the ground sliding but launched myself forward instantly. We collided again—

steel to energy, sparks to lightning—

daggers flashing in loops as we traded strikes so fast they blurred. I juked left, dodging a sweep of his sword that carved a trench through the floor. Using the flat of the blade as a springboard, I vaulted up and rocket-kicked him under the chin before landing in a crouch that cracked the stone beneath my feet.

He blasted upward, wings kicking open like giant black scythes, then spiraled down in a corkscrew of shadow energy. He hit the ground like a meteor, sending out another shockwave that blasted me off my feet and launched me into the wall hard enough to spiderweb the stone.

Before the dust even settled, he sprinted in—boots sparking—and swung. I ducked under the blade by an inch, only for him to snap-kick me so hard I ricocheted across the room and smashed through his own throne, splintering it into a storm of debris.

I sensed him coming again—energy pressure like a collapsing star—and teleported, reappearing right above him, daggers spinning, air warping around the blades. I dove, letting out a grunt that pulled celestial power into my core.

He hurled his sword upward like a throwing spear. The blade intercepted my strike mid-fall, detonating a shockwave so massive it pasted me to the wall.

I dropped to the ground on one knee—only to feel his hand clamp around my skull.

He slammed me into the stone so hard the castle floor cratered, dark energy erupting outward like liquid shadow. I rolled across the rubble, coughing, forcing myself up as he came at me again in bursts of impossible speed.

His sword blurred—and I met every strike with my daggers: spinning, ducking, flipping, even cracking him in the jaw with a flying kick mid-combo. I landed on the wall, feet gripping the stone like gravity didn't know who I was, then blasted off in a comet of violet celestial fire.

I streaked past him and slashed upward across his chin—

a white-hot arc of celestial blaze—

before skidding across the ground in a spray of sparks.

He spun his sword once, then brought it down and fired a massive beam of shadow energy straight at me. The entire room dimmed as if the blast swallowed the light itself.

I threw up a celestial barrier—thick, bright, humming—and the collision shook the entire castle. The blast buckled the walls, shattered windows, and sent waves of energy crawling through the stone.

But I dug deeper—

pulled in every atom of celestial force—

and let it erupt outward in a blinding explosion that ripped

right through his beam and shredded it into dust.

I launched forward, eyes blazing like twin stars going supernova. He met me in the middle, his sword colliding with my daggers in a catastrophic clash.

We spun.

We flipped.

We crashed through pillars and ricocheted across the throne room.

Metallic screams filled the air as our weapons collided hundreds of times in seconds.

I stabbed my daggers into the floor—BOOM—celestial fire towered out of them like volcanic pillars. Flames roared up my legs, igniting them in violet brilliance.

"CELESTIAL JET-SHOT!"

I blasted forward in a jet of celestial flame, turning into a burning comet as I tore through the air. BAM! A dropkick to the gut with one burning leg.

He rocketed backward.

Smashed through a section of the castle wall.

Lightning lit the sky behind him as he exploded out into the storm.

Rubble flew everywhere.

Rain hammered down.

Wind screamed through the giant hole in the castle.

While he was sprawled near the cliff edge, I teleported again—appearing right above him as lightning flashed across the sky like a strobe.

We crashed weapons again as I dropped onto him, unleashing a feral storm of dagger strikes, screaming through my clenched teeth.

He dodged his head side to side with snake-quick movements,

blocking with his sword in a flurry of sparks.

Then he surged upward with his chest, grabbed me by the neck, spun—

and drilled his fist across my cheek so hard I flew out into the open air, spinning helplessly as the storm swallowed me.

And yeah... I dropped.

I was flung across the storm, rain pelting me like a million tiny bullets as lightning stitched the sky open in jagged white veins.

Wind shredded past my ears.

My whole body felt like it was being punched by the atmosphere itself.

Behind me, a roar tore through the storm.

"WRETCHED CHILD!"

King Dreadixz shot toward me, wings stretched wide like shadowy blades, tail cracking through the air as he tore the rain apart with sheer force.

He blasted forward, the storm bending around him.

I snapped my eyes open—

and when his sword came swinging, I blasted upward in a vertical explosion, twirling to avoid the fiery lunar blast screaming past my feet.

He launched after me instantly.

We met mid-air in a clash of celestial and lunar fury,

BOOOOOM —

another shockwave erupted outward, tearing a ring through the storm clouds.

We collided again.

And again.

And again.

Each clash sending us spinning through the air like meteors

bouncing off each other.

Our final mid-air cross created a burst of violent light—

and he spun in a violet-black cyclone faster than the storm could track, slashing across my chest.

Pain tore through me. Blood flew.

I gasped, spiraling downward through the clouds, spinning helplessly as the rain became a blur and gravity sucked me toward the city below.

Dreadixz didn't wait.

He dove past me—and gut-punched me so hard I rocketed even farther across the sky, tumbling above the glowing neon skyline of Foreshade.

Before I could even breathe, he blasted under me and struck upward.

The hit detonated a shockwave in mid-air—a brilliant ring expanding outward—

and launched me straight back into the open sky like a fire-work.

Then everything went dark around him.

Violet and black flames wrapped around his entire body in a spiraling inferno.

His eyes snapped open—full lunar fury, feral and ancient. His wings spread so wide they eclipsed the moon.

He appeared above me in a blink.

His sword rose.

Burning.

Crackling.

Pulsing like a dying star.

He swung down—

—and a ring of black and violet energy exploded outward, vaporizing the rain around it and sending me rocketing to the

ground in a beam of pure force.

I slammed into the earth hard enough to create a crater that rippled across the entire district.

Buildings shook.

Cybernetic purple car alarms screamed.

Birds scattered like the sky itself panicked.

My vision flickered.

Everything was blurry.

I could barely breathe, barely move.

Lightning cracked—

and when I looked up, through the haze, I saw something that didn't look real.

Bright violet and black lightning twisted around the sky like a god rewriting reality.

Then—

Dreadixz roared.

Black and violet stars literally swirled around his sword as he burst out of the clouds with a spiraling trail of cosmic fire behind him. He wasn't flying anymore—

he was falling with intent to annihilate.

His sword dragged behind him as he spun through the storm, carving spirals of energy that made the clouds tear open into massive rings.

The energy around him burned so bright it flickered white at the edges, licking across his armor, twisting in violent patterns.

He twirled the sword like a dance of destruction,

wild, controlled, unstoppable.

Every movement bent the storm around him.

Every turn made the clouds part in terror.

Then he gripped the sword with both hands—

pulled all the swirling energy into the tip—

and the sky froze.

A single black star sparked into existence.

I heard him scream through the thunder—

"GUTTURAL... LUNAR!!!"

And the sky split open.

Black and violet slashes tore the world apart—

slicing through clouds, cutting through buildings, carving the ground into exploding fissures. The entire horizon looked shredded.

One slash cut through me.

Time snapped to black and white for a split second—

my body flashing like a negative photograph—

before reality came crashing back.

Then he appeared right in front of me.

No sound.

No warning.

Just pure lunar wrath.

He drove his sword into my chest—

—and the world turned white.

Not bright.

Not glowing.

White.

Like the light swallowed every color that ever existed.

Violet lunar fire erupted outward in a massive explosion that shook the land.

The shock tore through the sky.

Split the clouds.

Split the earth.

Split the whole damn horizon.

For a moment, Foreshade trembled like it was about to fall into the void.

Then Dreadixz snapped his fingers.

A razor-thin slash of dark violet energy appeared beneath me—

and slammed me into the ground like a suspended execution.

He rose slow — a mountain waking. Violet and black energy crawled across his eyes like ink spilled over a star; his armor was torn and dented, a map of the fight carved into iron. A fresh cut ran down his cheek; blood mixed with the grime. His crown was gone. The mask slipped away, and beneath it the king looked human and terrible: a long brown beard, a mouth scarred by old wars, one eye raw and burned where Archie had struck him at Eclitsic.

"Is this our Chosen One...?" he whispered, and the question was a blade that slid across the quiet.

I lay sprawled on the ground, the world a dizzy smear of rain and smoke. Blood painted my chest and the stone beneath me — hot, sticky maps of each hit. The sword jutted from my ribs like a terrible landmark; pain shot through me in waves that knocked the air out of my lungs. Each breath was a jagged thing. My eyes stung, but they still burned with celestial light.

He dragged me by the hair like a ragdoll and shoved my face into the grit. Rocks scraped my skin; the scent of ozone and burning metal filled my nostrils. Sunrise was bleeding into the sky, turning smoke to silver and purple, and the whole world felt like it was bracing for something.

"Kid." His metallic glove curled around the sword's hilt. "These are the battles where you're meant to win."

He pushed, smiling that flat, brutal smile. "But you didn't."

The blade drove deeper. Pain tore a new language through me and I screamed until the sound broke like glass. Tears slicked down my cheeks — not only from the pain that radiated through

my ribs, but from the one that sat heavier: the ache of failure. Everything I'd worked for felt like a candle sputtering out in a storm.

He rained blows down on me like a god performing punishment. Each hit landed with the vibration of an earthquake; each strike made celestial energy around us snap and flare. "DO YOU REALIZE HOW MUCH EFFORT YOU HAD TO PUT IN JUST TO COME AND FIGHT ME?!" he barked, and then another blow. "AND THEN LOSE?!" Another. "WHAT IS YOUR REASON FOR FIGHTING THEN?!" The fists came like a hammering heartbeat. "IF YOU'RE JUST GONNA DIE!" "AN INSECT!" "THAT'S WHAT YOU ARE — AN INSECT WITH NO PURPOSE!"

My vision blurred into an ocean of red. Each hit felt like an emotional cannon, exploding a memory into my chest: training nights, the promise I'd made, the faces of everyone I'd let down. The grief of it burned hotter than the blood. He didn't stop. He couldn't see the way my hands trembled, how my will was a frayed rope.

And then — a cleft of air cut through the rhythm. On instinct, on nothing but the barest thread of something stubborn, I clapped my palms against his fists as he winded up for another strike. A WHOOM of pressure slammed outward; wind rolled across the battlefield in a living sheet. For a heartbeat, he froze, eyebrows arched in surprise, the blood on his beard catching the dawn.

It was enough.

My mouth trembled. A smile — thin and ridiculous — cracked across my face through the blood. "You—didn't... let me—finish," I whispered. The words felt like a promise and a dare at once.

Celestial energy answered me. It rose from the ground like

smoke obeying a command, snaking up my ribs and through the sword lodged in me. My fingers tightened around his gauntlet with all the strength I could steal from whatever reserves remained. Violet light blossomed at my knuckles, a small sun that burned the fog.

My hair began to change; the strands lengthened and ignited into spiky tendrils of violet flame that whipped like banners in a storm. The energy wrapped my limbs, knitting itself into armor of light. My eyes — my stupid, stubborn eyes — flared with a symbol: two glowing letters, K and X, burning where pupils should be. Every breath I pulled pushed a thread of luminous purple into the air; each exhale spelled the two letters, like a signature carved into the dawn.

The ground answered with a thunderous second: a shockwave rolled outward from me and smacked into Dreadixz's chest. He slid backward, boots scrabbling for purchase, armor grinding against stone until sparks flew. Celestial flames licked across my skin, then wrapped both of my legs in roaring violet fire. I pushed off the floor and stood.

Sound swelled — the distant, cinematic thrum that feels like destiny setting its rhythm. My heart thudded in time with it, a living drum pulsing violet light through my veins. Energy coalesced into a spear of radiance between my palms and then cracked the sky itself: a towering column of violet that pierced the clouds and bathed Foreshade in a wash of impossible color. Trails of celestial smoke twirled along the beam, painting the city in strokes of otherworldly light.

The flames crawled across the courtyard toward Dreadixz like hungry rivers. He snarled, eyes flicking with both annoyance and a shred of respect. For the first time since this began, his beard — the ragged mess that made him look like a king and a

butcher — moved in the wind with something like uncertainty.

I didn't scream. I didn't shout. I walked.

Each step left footprints scorched into the stone; each breath made the air shimmer. My hooked fingers smoked with energy; I crossed my arms and unleashed everything I was holding back. A jagged streak of violet shot upward, ripping the clouds open, sending shards of lightning cascading around the beam. The sky screamed and Foreshade answered, windows exploding inward as the shockwaves rolled through.

Dreadixz met me with a slow, deliberate turn of his head. "If that's how we're playing, kid... let it be," he said, voice low and dangerous. Then he lunged.

He punched, and the world fractured into a burst of speed. I blinked in violet light and teleported beside him — the motion a blink, a trick of will — then backhanded him into the air. He felt the impact; I felt it in my jaw. He flew up, suspended in a whirl of wind, and for a split second his expression looked... thrilled.

"LET THIS FIGHT BE ONE EVERYONE REMEMBERS, DON!" he roared, voice gone massive enough to rattle the heavens.

I dropped my daggers. My body glowed like a beacon of violet flame; hair whipping, chest heaving with a force that tasted like consequence and hope. I faced him, hands unclenched, the two letters searing hot in my vision.

"If that's what you want," I said, every syllable a fuse, "then I'll give it to you... painfully."

The wind pushed back. Thunder held its breath. The whole world leaned in.

Light didn't just emerge — it **tore** through the darkness, ripping a hole in the night as I blasted upward. The ground split from the force, stone lifting like it was afraid to touch me.

Dreadixz didn't hesitate, dude sprinted toward me through

the dark like a demon who's been waiting centuries for this one moment.

We collided midair.

The shockwave screamed, ripping the sky in jagged lines like something alive and angry.

I seized his arm, twisted, and hurled him across the heavens. He became a streak of purple and black flame tearing through storm clouds.

He recovered instantly, hurling shadow-blasts at me that looked like chunks of the night sky burning.

I swerved through the storm — lightning flashing, rain evaporating before touching me — and we crashed again, right above the distant terrain.

His eyes flashed. Mine flashed back.

Then he swung his blade.

CRACK.

I snapped it in half like it was made of bone.

My counter-blast hit him so hard he tumbled through the thunderstorm, getting swallowed by the darkness between lightning strikes.

He clapped his hands.

Black fire surged outward — writhing, alive, like the screams of something dying.

I responded by summoning **ten violet celestial shields**, each rune glowing like an eye. They shattered one by one, taking the brunt of the demonic fire.

I charged. He countered.

We met in the storm again.

Punches, kicks, strikes — all happening faster than the lightning around us.

One wrong move and the world below would've been vapor.

I slipped to the side, elbowed his ribs, flash-kicked his other arm upward, snatched it, spun downward, and slammed my heel into his chest.

A spear of violet lightning ripped down the sky on impact.

He screamed — more fury than pain — as he saw his own reflection burning in my eyes.

Then we shot downward in twin streaks of light.

The crash wasn't a crash.

It was a detonation, a shockwave ripping across Foreshade, flattening ruins, shaking mountains, turning the horizon white.

Smoke choked the air.

My glowing arm swept it aside.

He lunged for my legs; I spun and hurricane-kicked him so hard he flew across the land like a meteor. He burst through a jagged rock formation, shattering stone like glass.

I didn't hesitate.

Two blazing celestial beams erupted from my arms, swirling like twin dragons of fire. They merged in the air into one impossible, howling blast.

When it hit him —

the world turned purple.

A dome of celestial energy consumed Foreshade.

Everything inside evaporated into violet nonexistence — buildings, rock, shadows, all erased in one silent flash.

When the dust finally faded, I stood in the center of the carnage, glowing like a lone star surrounded by darkness. Celestial flames curled around me like dripping liquid light.

I flicked my finger.

A small flame leapt off — pulsing like a heartbeat.

Across the ruined ground, Dreadixz lay slumped, armor cracked like a broken shell, sword snapped in half. Blood leaked

down his beard, his face torn, bruised, barely recognizable.

He lifted his head.

One trembling tear of blood slid down his cheek.

"Years of fighting.... and yet a child—has bested me... I'm perplexed—but also—pissed..."

I spit out a celestial flame and stepped forward through the burning city — each footstep glowing with violet pulses. My shadow stretched across the ground like a monster walking beside me.

"No wondering how I beat you," I said quietly. "Just understand this is the end, Dreadixz. This time? Forever."

I reached down, grabbed the broken half of his sword, and stood above him as my eyes narrowed.

"This is the end... of your chapter... of your episode."

"RAH!"

I drove the blade into his chest.

The explosion wasn't bright — it was **violent**, cold, a violet eruption that shook the entire land. The storm stopped. The rain froze. The world fell into dead silence.

I dropped to my knees, head bowed, as the celestial energy peeled away from me like smoke leaving a dying fire.

Everything was quiet.

Too quiet.

I lifted my head.

Dreadixz lay sprawled across the ground, blood pouring from his chest.

No breath. No movement.

No heartbeat.

He was finally...

dead.

| #1.34 — Incarceration... |

Room of Zeniths – War Above Celestia

Incarceration stood at the center of nine towering pillars, the molten-gold floor beneath him rippling like liquid fire.

But the pillars had changed.

They weren't gold anymore.

They crackled with violent, nightmarish red energy, veins of corrupted light crawling up their surfaces like living scars. Black fractures split through the once-pristine structures, leaking crimson energy into the air like smoke that didn't belong in reality.

The Room of Zeniths stretched wide above him, but something was wrong.

The light itself felt infected.

Above, Celestia burned. Exploding towers. Clashing armies. Smoke curling through the sky like serpents. But inside this chamber, the chaos felt distant, muted, almost unreal.

He was untouched.

A dark eye sitting dead center in the storm.

The statues of the nine Zeniths still loomed, but even they were breaking. Thin cracks traced across their stone bodies.

Faint red light bled through their eyes like something was rewriting them from the inside out.

Far in the distance, the Power Gems pulsed.

Reality bent around them in uneven waves. Space warped and stuttered, as if the world itself was refusing to accept what was happening.

A thin, cold smile curved Incarceration's lips.

"The finality of everything bending toward me."

He turned and walked toward the balcony.

Shadows stretched out in unnatural directions behind him, twitching and distorting across the molten tiles. The pillars behind him hummed low and unstable, like engines choking on too much power.

Then his laugh cut loose, sharp and ugly, tearing through the air and ricocheting off distant towers.

He reached the railing and looked down.

Explosions ripped through the city. Buildings collapsed in spirals of fire. Orange, red, and violet flames twisted together like living ribbons. Celestianites and Lunaranites collided across the battlefield in chaotic bursts of light and steel, debris spinning through the sky like falling stars.

The pillars pulsed again.

Harder.

For a split second, silhouettes flickered inside the red energy. Twisted shapes forming, collapsing, forming again, like something inside was trying to break through.

"The insanity of it all," Incarceration roared, crimson eyes flaring like twin suns. "The greatest massacre of the century."

A sharp voice cut through the chaos.

"You really think you can hold this alone?"

Shadows snapped tight around him like living smoke.

Two blurs tore across the corrupted floor, one molten purple and the other blazing orange.

Krane and Overbrawl.

"Perfect," Incarceration said, voice grinding like steel dragged over stone. "Side characters."

He stepped forward.

The pillars reacted instantly.

Red energy snapped between them in violent arcs. Lightning-like surges struck the floor as the air itself buckled around him.

Overbrawl's fists ignited, each punch leaving burning trails in the air. Sparks froze mid-flight for a split second before shattering forward again.

"Hey," Overbrawl shouted, "call us side characters and that's what your jaw is gonna look like when we're done with you."

Incarceration tilted his head slightly. "What are you gonna do, kiss me?"

Krane's fists flared with molten spiritual energy, light crackling around his arms as he shot forward across shattered tiles and broken spires. "Don't make my little brother angry. And that was pretty wild of you, sir."

"Okay," Incarceration said, grin stretching wider, almost wrong in how it moved.

Then it broke loose.

Fist met fist.

The impact detonated the air. The spire around them cracked outward as shockwaves tore through its structure. Overbrawl slammed in next like a flaming comet, orange fire ripping across the battlefield, shards of stone scattering like meteors.

Punches and kicks blurred together. Red, purple, gold, and cyan streaked through the space between them like paint thrown across reality.

Incarceration twisted free, grabbed Overbrawl mid-motion, and drove him down into the floor like a falling star. The molten tiles exploded outward.

Krane struck from behind. Hook. Uppercut. Knee. Each hit stacking faster than the last until Incarceration's head snapped forward and back in a blur of motion.

He staggered.

Then pivoted.

A whip-fast kick launched Krane across the air, twisting him through debris and flame.

Overbrawl answered instantly, erupting into a storm of fireballs. Each explosion lit the sky in violent bursts, but Incarceration moved through them like a shadow slipping between flames. Unbothered. Unbroken.

He spun and caught Overbrawl mid-flight, launching him skyward with a brutal flaming kick.

Krane came in again, intercepting mid-air.

Fist met grip.

Slam.

The collision sent Krane tearing across rooftops like a comet losing control.

Overbrawl condensed into a burning sphere and dropped from above like a meteor. The impact shattered streets below, sending shockwaves through the city. Towers shook. Smoke curled violet and red into the sky.

Incarceration rose through it all.

Dark energy clung to him like living fire, untouched by the destruction around him.

Krane rushed him again from behind.

Incarceration spun.

A crimson explosion of a punch detonated mid-air.

Overbrawl was sent tearing through a distant spire, fire and sparks trailing behind him like a collapsing star.

Then all three collided.

Mid-air.

A storm of fists, kicks, and detonations folding into each other. The sky fractured with every impact. Clouds tore apart. Light bent. Perspective broke.

Red. Violet. Cyan. Gold.

Everything moved too fast to fully follow, just flashes of violence stitched together by destruction.

Incarceration broke through it all.

An elbow crashed into Krane's temple. A grab twisted him mid-motion. Then a violent throw sent him spiraling through the air.

Nightmare energy surged through Incarceration's fists as he followed through, each blow hammering the space around them until even light looked unstable.

Then he caught Krane by the head.

They dropped.

Straight through Celestia's skyline.

Black shockwaves ripped across the city below, tearing streets apart and throwing entire structures off balance. Golden towers cracked and fell. Sparks and molten fragments rained upward and downward at the same time.

He hauled Krane upright mid-fall, aura crackling violently, eyes burning like collapsing embers.

His voice cut through the ruin, calm and sharp at the same time.

"Let the darkness enrage."

In the middle of the Enchanted Kingdom

Smoke strangled the battlefield, thick and acrid, swallowing sound and carrying the distant screams of war. Lunaranites and Celestianites collided in a violent storm of fire and impact.

The once-golden plains were gone.

Now they were blackened, split open like shattered glass, bleeding ash and molten light across the ground.

Dark Don stood above it all, still.

His eyes swept across the horizon as lightning carved jagged scars through storm-dark skies. His grin widened—cruel, unnatural, almost not human anymore. Below him, monstrous beasts and armored Lunaranites dropped from the clouds like falling meteors, smashing into the earth with bone-rattling force.

The world was collapsing in waves.

Millions surged forward beneath him, a living tide of destruction rolling over Celestia's broken land.

Dark Don finally turned to his team. Calm. Detached. Untouchable.

"Go handle the weak ones," he said, voice low and mocking. "Incarceration's calling. I'll be back before you even notice I left."

A blink.

Black light snapped around him.

And he was gone.

The battlefield didn't pause for him. It just got louder.

Fire roared higher. Buildings folded under pressure and collapsed into burning heaps. The ground trembled with nonstop impact. Winged Lunaranites screamed overhead, cutting through smoke with blades and speed, turning the sky into a

moving execution field.

Jaylen stared down at the blood on his palm.

Then he closed his fist.

"We hold the line," he said, voice steady. "Nobody breaks."

Kayson slid up beside him, eyes wide, breath uneven.

"Jaylen, there's too many. I feel like even I could get full if I ate that whole army."

Jaylen glanced at him, then smirked like he was annoyed at the universe itself.

"The more you complain, the faster you get folded," he said. "So yeah. Try not to die while you're talking."

That landed.

The team moved.

Power flared across the battlefield in bursts. Weapons ignited. Energy snapped to life like the world itself had been kicked awake.

Jaylen drew his dual-bladed golden sword. Cyan lightning crawled along the edges like a living pulse.

"Heroes of Avangard," he shouted. "LET'S MAKE HISTORY."

The charge broke.

The battlefield answered with chaos.

Guervens unleashed molten fury, rivers of lava tearing through enemy lines and carving glowing scars into the earth. Jaylen leapt high, blades slicing cyan arcs through smoke and sky, splitting formations apart mid-charge.

Fedjina soared overhead in falcon form, cutting through clouds and dropping golden beams that erased enemies in bursts of light.

Jocabed raised a storm of blizzard force. Ice snapped through the air in razor sheets, freezing monsters mid-step before they shattered on impact. Emely followed with jagged ice spikes

raining down like falling spears, pinning enemies into the scorched ground.

Ryan moved like he was synced to destruction itself, skating through explosions, launching missiles with casual precision.

"Apocalypse o'clock," he shouted, flipping over a blast as it detonated behind him in a shower of sparks.

Sophia slammed both hands down.

Sound exploded outward.

Musical shockwaves rippled through the battlefield, cracking stone, collapsing beasts, and vibrating the air until even fire seemed to stutter. Pink, gold, and molten energy fused into a chaotic symphony of destruction.

William twisted through the sky, shifting mid-flight between forms. Winds howled from his movements, slamming enemies back in violent gusts. His airborne strikes turned the sky into a battlefield of motion and pressure.

Above it all, Anhia hovered nervously on a broken rooftop. Sparks and mud splashed near her boots. Glitter caught the firelight like it didn't belong here at all.

"Do you see this?" she blurted. "My outfit is literally ruined. I can't—"

Sophia snapped her head toward her instantly.

"One, the battlefield is on fire," she said flatly. "Two, nobody cares about glitter right now. Snap out of it. Diamonds don't panic. They cut."

Anhia froze.

Then she exhaled, tightened her stance, and something in her expression shifted.

The panic dropped.

Resolve replaced it.

Her dress stayed intact—for now. Her wings aligned cleanly

behind her. Focus locked in.

Below, the war intensified again.

Jaylen carved through swarms with golden and cyan arcs splitting the air. Fedjina and Emely synchronized strikes—light and ice locking enemies mid-air before crashing them down into ruin. Ryan's explosions stitched gaps through the battlefield, opening paths through sheer destruction.

William's wind pressure scattered entire formations like dust in a storm.

Jaylen's eyes lifted.

Not to the soldiers.

To the source.

The Power Gems.

They pulsed in the distance, bending reality in unstable waves as the Celestial Pillars pulled energy into themselves like starving gods.

Dark Don's presence still lingered over everything like a shadow that refused to lift.

Celestia burned below them—smoke wrapping shattered towers, streets turned into a glowing web of fire. The golden castle still stood at the center, damaged but refusing to fall.

Jaylen understood it now.

This wasn't just survival anymore.

Stop the Pillars. Break the cycle. Or everything turns to ash.

Meanwhile – Incarceration vs Krane and Overbrawl

Incarceration's fists hit Krane like detonations, each blow ripping him across the cracked golden road. The battlefield around them blurred into chaos—screams, collapsing structures, and civilians scattering like ash in a storm.

Krane forced himself up.

Barely.

Before he could fully recover, Incarceration was already there again.

A shadow tearing through reality itself.

His grip locked onto Krane's shoulder with brutal precision.

"Didn't think I was done with you," he hissed.

He lifted Krane clean off the ground and hurled him like a meteor through the storm-dark sky. The air bent around the motion, colors smearing into violent streaks of red and violet as impact collided midair.

Then came the slam.

Incarceration drove him down through the clouds in a crushing body drop, the two of them spiraling through roiling storm systems. Lightning snapped past like white-hot blades, turning the sky into a flickering cage of destruction. Nightmare energy followed every movement, hammering Krane from every angle without pause.

A streak of orange cut through it all.

Overbrawl.

A cyclone of flame and motion tore into the fight with a spinning kick that forced Incarceration off balance. Behind them, golden buildings erupted under pressure, oil trucks detonating in chains of fire and smoke that twisted into spirals around the battlefield.

"You... how did you survive that?" Incarceration's voice cut through the storm, jagged and sharp. His eyes flickered with unstable nightmare light.

Krane pushed himself up again, blood tracing his jawline. His stare didn't waver.

"You underestimate what we fight for," he said.

Overbrawl cracked his knuckles, flames licking off his fists like living fury. "Even villains have limits. And hearts."

He grinned through the chaos.

Incarceration tilted his head slightly. An eyebrow rose.

Shadow energy rolled off him like liquid night. "Hearts," he echoed. "Interesting. You two are closer than I thought."

Overbrawl shouted back immediately, unfiltered. "WE'RE BLOOD RELATED, BY THE WAY!"

Krane exhaled, shaking off the moment.

"I'll take him first," he said. "Ready?"

Overbrawl nodded, fists igniting again, orange arcs slicing through smoke like molten wire.

"I would never be late to beat the brakes off someone."

Incarceration's tail flicked through the air, cutting through the storm's motion with a sharp hiss.

"I don't wear boxers," he said casually. "We're Zeniths. Half-gods. And we don't really do clothing rules."

His gaze snapped down.

Krane's wrist.

The watch.

It pulsed once.

Then black Zenith nanobots exploded across it in an instant, crawling and reshaping metal and flesh alike. Krane jerked back as his arm mutated into a jagged, red-pulsing steel blade.

Before he could react, the weapon twisted free and snapped toward Incarceration, locking into his arm with a sharp mechanical click.

His other arm transformed next.

A black cannon formed from writhing shadow-metal, smoke curling along its surface like something alive.

Krane's eyes widened.

"No way you're using that against us," he barked, fists igniting with violet energy that left glowing trails in the air.

Incarceration smiled.

Barely.

"Oh... now the fun starts."

Krane clenched both fists, cyan light erupting outward in violent bursts, trailing like comet fire.

"This isn't over," he said. "Not even close."

Jaylen's Perspective

I sprinted across the battlefield, metallic boots crunching through stone and ash. Smoke choked the air, every breath hot and gritty, like the world itself was burning from the inside out. Buildings lay collapsed in jagged stacks, like broken tombstones marking a dead city.

Everything felt like it was falling apart in slow motion.

I stayed human. No transformations. No armor. Nothing to fall back on except skill.

My choice. My risk.

Sparks of light ripped across the sky as Lunaranites hurled energy spears downward. Each impact detonated in violent bursts, sending shockwaves through the ground. I slipped between them, sliding across fractured pavement, eyes locked forward.

A body dropped beside me.

I didn't look.

Couldn't afford to.

Through the smoke, I saw it.

A piercing blue beam shooting out of Celestia Castle, cutting through the night like a signal from something divine. Unstable. Bright. Almost unreal in the middle of all this ruin.

"Jackpot," I muttered, low and steady.

I pushed harder.

Muscles burned. Air turned heavier. The battlefield blurred into motion and noise—Celestianites and Lunaranites colliding in every direction, metal and energy and screams folding into one endless sound.

Every explosion painted the sky brighter.

Closer to chaos.

Then the wind shifted.

Not naturally.

The air thickened, like gravity itself had doubled. My body slowed for half a second, instincts screaming at me before my mind caught up.

Stop.

Too late.

He landed.

Dark Don slammed into the ground just ahead.

The impact carved a crater deep enough to swallow a truck whole. The shockwave hit me like a freight train, throwing me backward through dust and shattered glass. I rolled with it, slid, then snapped up onto one knee—blade already drawn before I even realized I'd moved.

He stood in the smoke.

Still.

Motionless.

His aura bled through the dust like fire leaking from a broken furnace. The red in his eyes didn't glow.

It burned.

His voice cut through everything. Calm. Low. Controlled. Like a storm deciding whether to start.

"You shouldn't have come here, Jaylen."

The ground cracked under his step as he started walking forward. The air around him distorted, warping like reality was bending away from him.

I exhaled slowly. Tightened my grip.

"Guess we're past talking, then."

No hesitation left. No distractions.

Just me.

My blade.

And a monster wearing a familiar face.

Focus.

| #1.35 — Oh Well, |

The seven of them sprinted through a sky burned orange by war. They climbed a jagged green hill, sharp rock formations jutting out like nature had tried to build weapons of its own. The whole place felt like a mountain that had gone feral, swallowed under swirling storm clouds ready to break.

They ran uphill at full speed.

None of them really knew where they were going.

Above them, alien Uragas screeched through the air, cannon-tipped wings slicing the sky like living war machines.

"THE CELESTIANITE PRINCESS?!" Olsen shouted, eyes snapping to Starla.

Her hair whipped wildly behind her as she ran. "Don't worry! I'll explain later, just RUN!"

So they did.

They pushed higher up the slope as the sun crept through the horizon. The sky filled with black-winged alien birds, scattered like ink stains, buzzing with lethal intent.

Then Starla stopped.

A sharp growl echoed from somewhere beyond the hill.

Everyone froze.

Heads shifted. Eyes scanned. Silence tightened like a rope.

Over the ridge, something moved.

A Lunaranite.

Not a soldier. Not trained.

One of the wild, summoned beasts—twisted constructs fueled by Power Gems, all instinct and violence.

Starla pointed fast. "Behind that rock. Now."

They dropped into cover behind a jagged stone outcrop. Some crouched low. Some stayed standing too tense to even notice. Breathing went quiet. Fingers pressed to lips.

The growls multiplied.

One.

Two.

Then more.

Prince whispered, "There's more?"

Olsen didn't even look at him. "NO SHIT THERE'S MORE. WE'RE IN AN APOCALYPSE."

Archie raised a brow. "Why in the living fireballs is the hottest princess here with us?"

Starla shot him a glare so sharp it could've cut steel, but before she could respond, Demaurion tensed at the growls, and Ella grabbed him just in time to steady him.

Then came the sound.

A talon scraping stone.

Slow.

Deliberate.

Their hearts hit overdrive.

A Lunaranite's head slowly slid around the rock, scanning the open air. Not looking at them. Just searching.

Silence held.

No one moved.

Not even breath.

The beast turned—

"SUCK ON THIS EXPLOSION!"

Archie launched himself forward.

His fists ignited mid-air, slamming into the creature's face in a burst of flame and impact. The beast flew back in a fiery detonation.

Archie landed, brushing smoke off his shoulders like it was nothing. Hands on hips.

"Wasn't that bad. Where were you guys while I was carrying?"

"IDIOT!" Ella snapped, pointing uphill. "DO YOU NOT SEE THAT FLOCK?!"

Archie looked up.

Thirty Lunaranites.

Armed. Screeching. Charging.

"Oh," he said. "Shit."

The hill erupted.

Archie got hit first, tackling into one of them and rolling down the slope in a chaotic blur of fists and fire like a burning tumbleweed.

Above him, the others jumped in.

Olsen swung his hammer and launched one Lunaranite clean off the hill before spinning into another. Demaurion whipped his trident in sharp, brutal arcs, cutting through enemies with controlled fury. Ella fired compressed sand bursts that exploded into choking dust clouds, blinding anything that got too close.

From above, streaks of gold and cyan dropped like falling stars.

Starla.

She hit the battlefield midair, tearing through enemies with radiant precision.

Archie slammed his opponent into the ground with a body drop that cracked the earth beneath them. A shockwave fol-

lowed, ending it instantly.

The fight turned into full chaos.

Fire. Ice. Sand. Lightning. Screams.

More Lunaranites surged over the ridge.

Claws. Spears. Tail-whips. All closing in.

Then Archie shot upward again.

"YO, FOCUS UP!" he yelled.

He formed a glowing orange explosive in his hands and hurled it into the crowd.

It rolled across the ground like a beeping cylinder of death.

Everyone paused just long enough to think they were safe.

Then it veered.

Hit a rock.

Bounced upward.

Smacked Archie in the head.

And rolled straight back toward them.

The beeping sped up.

Olsen tried to stop it with his hammer.

"Ah—AH—IT BURNS IT BURNS IT BURNS—"

Ella grabbed at it in panic. "IT'S NOT STOPPING—ARCHIE!"

Archie's grin dropped instantly.

"...oh fu—"

BOOOOOOM.

The explosion launched all of them backward in a wave of fire and dirt, scattering weapons and pride across the hillside.

Olsen groaned, rolling onto his back. "Archie... I swear sometimes I think you're one bad decision away from a special education class."

Silent Eli just stared at the sky like he was reconsidering reality itself.

Demaurion, scorched and furious, stabbed his trident into the

ground. "I can beat your ass once and I WILL do it again!"

"Sorry gang," Archie muttered, shaking soot off his hair. "We were almost winning though."

Prince wiped ash off his shoulders. "You almost deleted us from existence."

Ella shook her head, ears drooping. "Great. Now my ears are dusty."

"My wings!" Starla flapped hers, trying to fix them.

Archie stretched. "Still kinda hot tho."

He immediately got slapped.

The group looked out over the battlefield.

The hill was littered with fallen beasts, the grass stained dark.

Beyond it—

Musicia.

Once a city of gold and pink towers and the elegant castle of Queen Soundzwave. Now a warzone.

Uragas screamed through the sky, ripping buildings apart with cannon fire. Lunaranites tore through streets like living disasters. Alien birds strafed architecture, reducing entire districts to rubble under storm-dark clouds.

Everything was collapsing.

Starla's expression tightened.

Then she looked upward.

At the castle's highest point.

A golden bridge stretched into the sky, crackling with unstable lightning, piercing the storm like a broken signal from heaven.

"We have to do something," she whispered.

Prince stepped beside her. "Princess... what exactly are we supposed to do here?"

Starla stared at the destruction for a moment longer.

Then she exhaled.

"Someone activated the Celestial Pillars. The Power Gems are moving."

Her voice sharpened.

"If we don't stop it now, Celestia—and all of Avangard—falls."

She turned fully toward them.

"It could be Incarceration. Dark Don. Dreadixz. Anyone."

Her wings tightened.

"I'm Starla, Celestianite Princess. And we're stopping this war on Celestia."

A beat.

"We reach the Pillars before the Power Gems do."

Her eyes narrowed.

"And I already know how."

At the War of Celestia

Flames swallowed the ruins in rolling waves, jumping from collapsed block to collapsed block like the city had developed a second, angrier heartbeat. Smoke churned thick and suffocating, dragging the sky down with it—gray curtains swallowing fractured light as they curled through broken towers and half-collapsed streets. Everything felt submerged in ash and heat.

Dark Don stood at the center of it all, fists clenched, lunar energy crawling across his body in jagged pulses. His grin cut through the smoke—sharp, unstable, almost amused by the end of the world unfolding around him.

Across from him, Jaylen burned brighter.

His aura layered in cyan and gold, snapping together like two forces constantly arguing over control. His jaw was locked

tight, eyes fixed forward, energy coiling around his limbs like something alive that couldn't wait any longer.

The air between them cracked.

Silver. Cyan. Gold.

A collision of pressure tore outward, slicing the skyline into jagged fragments of light. Buildings tilted under invisible force. Streets bent like softened metal. The entire city warped around the moment their powers touched.

"You flip quick when things heat up," Dark Don muttered, voice low, almost entertained.

Jaylen didn't slow.

"Things are about to flip."

They vanished into impact.

BOOM.

The collision detonated in layered color—silver, cyan, and gold exploding outward in expanding rings that shredded debris into spirals. The shockwave didn't just push the environment. It rewrote it, turning straight streets into warped angles and floating fragments that drifted for a moment before gravity remembered them.

Jaylen reappeared behind him instantly.

A knee drove into Dark Don's lunar armor.

The impact rang out like a bell forged from collapsing stone.

Dark Don twisted mid-air, encasing himself in a sphere of lunar light as he dropped like a guided meteor. He hit the ground and split cracked streets into molten seams glowing beneath the ruin.

Jaylen followed.

A streak of cyan-gold fire cut through smoke and rubble, weaving over collapsing debris like gravity had stopped applying rules to him. He flipped mid-air and dropped into a kick.

The collision hit.

The city answered.

Buildings behind them shuddered—then burst outward in slow-motion fractures of gold, silver, and ash, like the entire district was disassembling itself in rhythm with their fight.

Dark Don skidded back, lunar energy spiraling off his limbs in broken arcs.

He struck first.

Gut punch. Hook. Jab. Backhand.

Each hit snapped Jaylen through layers of smoke, silver and cyan trails scattering behind him like shattered glass catching firelight.

"You're fast," Dark Don growled, appearing above him mid-fall, "but fast enough?"

Jaylen didn't respond.

Dream Weaver ignited in his hand—cyan and gold syncing into a single razor-edged glow.

He cut through the air.

Arcs of light snapped outward, carving through smoke like blades through fog. Dark Don blocked each strike, impact flashes rippling across the horizon like miniature suns breaking apart.

He lunged.

A direct hit sent Jaylen tumbling—but he corrected mid-spin, planting himself against the air as if it had weight, blade sparking as he reoriented.

"You're gonna have to do better," Jaylen shouted, launching forward again.

One slash.

Two.

Three.

Each strike left glowing ribbons suspended in the air for half

a heartbeat before collapsing into sparks.

He flipped over Dark Don, fist igniting with condensed energy.

Impact.

Dark Don spun out and slammed into the ground hard enough to make the entire block buckle. Concrete and dust erupted upward like a delayed explosion.

Dark Don rose immediately.

Now furious.

"VICIOUS LUNAR!"

He blurred forward.

The fight stopped being readable.

It became weather.

Fists. Knees. Elbows. Kicks.

Too fast to track cleanly—only flashes of motion, impact points, and shockwaves registering after the fact. Jaylen blocked where he could, blade screaming against lunar pressure, sparks tearing off in violent fragments.

Dark Don rotated through him, caught Jaylen mid-guard, and smashed him downward.

The ground cracked outward in concentric fractures.

Jaylen bounced.

Recovered.

Got hit again.

And again.

And again.

Every impact rewrote the battlefield slightly—streets folding, angles shifting, debris lifting for fractions of a second before gravity corrected like it was embarrassed it had failed.

Jaylen forced space with a rising slash, cutting through lunar pressure like tearing fabric.

Teleport.

He reappeared behind Dark Don.

Backhand.

Dark Don staggered.

Jaylen shot upward in a spiral of cyan-gold light, gathering momentum above the ruined skyline.

"DREAM'S DESCEND!"

He dropped.

The strike hit like a falling star.

BOOOOM.

Dark Don crashed through layers of broken city, shockwaves bending streets into warped curves as smoke swallowed the impact zone.

Then—

A second flash.

Jaylen raised his hand mid-air.

"BRIGHTENING HEAVENS!"

A beam erupted outward—cyan and gold spiraling together into a piercing column that carved through smoke and lit the entire skyline like forced daylight punching through ash.

Dark Don answered instantly.

Both fists rose.

Energy collided mid-air.

The explosion didn't expand.

It twisted—warping clouds into spiraling rings that hung above the city like broken halos.

Half a second of silence.

Then movement again.

Both rising.

Both still fighting.

Dark Don stomped the air, lunar force spiraling around him as debris lifted and orbited like the battlefield itself had entered

his gravity field.

Jaylen tightened his grip on Dream Weaver.

The blade hummed higher, sharper, syncing with his pulse like it had learned his rhythm.

They launched.

Two living projectiles.

BOOM.

Mid-air collision shattered the sound barrier.

The world cracked in response.

Buildings tilted at wrong angles. The sky flickered black and white. Debris hung suspended for a heartbeat like physics forgot its job.

They spun through the air exchanging strikes at impossible speed.

Slash. Counter. Impact. Reposition. Strike again.

Dream Weaver carved cyan-gold arcs through smoke, each one detonating into bursts of light.

A blade-infused blast shoved Dark Don backward.

He recovered instantly.

Closed distance.

Then pressure.

A brutal sequence of strikes slammed into Jaylen's guard—chest, ribs, jaw, gut—each hit forcing him lower through the air until he was driven back into the ruined city below.

Jaylen swept upward with a counter-slash, cutting through lunar aura like mist tearing apart.

He grabbed Dark Don mid-motion.

Spun.

And hurled him across the city.

Dark Don twisted mid-fall.

Teleported.

Appeared above.

A kick drove Jaylen straight down.

The impact shredded streets outward in a circular blast.

Jaylen hit.

Rolled.

Forced himself halfway up—

Got hit again.

Uppercut. Overhand. Another strike that folded him into the ground like the earth was trying to close over him.

Dark Don spun through him like a weapon, launching Jaylen into the last standing structure in the district.

A massive Celestianite transport tower.

Impact.

The building detonated inward.

Steel, concrete, and glass exploded outward in long shimmering fragments, turning the air into a storm of debris and light.

Jaylen tumbled through it all.

Falling.

Rolling.

Barely moving.

Dream Weaver slipped from his hand and clattered across broken stone.

He landed on his side.

Still.

Blood mixing with ash.

For the first time, the battlefield quieted.

Smoke drifted.

Fire cracked softly in the distance.

A twitch.

His fingers moved.

Cyan-gold light flickered weakly along Dream Weaver's blade.

Still calling him back.
Not done yet.

| #1.36 — Lock In |

Dark clouds swirled overhead like a blanket suffocating the sky, painting everything in eerie purple. The city of Musicia looked empty now. The Musinites weren't dead—they'd escaped, lucky enough to flee up the stairs to Celestia.

But Musicia was wrecked. Like a whole chapter ripped out of history.

Buildings lay in ruins: splintered, collapsed, torn in half, leaning like they were one good push from crumbling. Smoke rose from broken rooftops. Cars and buses were everywhere—crushed, rusted, glass shattered across the streets like glitter. It wasn't just a wreck. It wasn't safe. It wasn't even a city anymore.

The whole place felt haunted. Power Gem-made Lunaranites circled the ruins like they owned them, flying between what few buildings were left standing. Thunder cracked, lightning flashed sharp across the purple sky. Beasts wandered the streets alongside them—creatures as dangerous as Lunaranites, maybe worse. Some of them were probably as deadly as Homicide the Hydra.

And if something's scarier than a Hydra summoned by Incarceration himself? Yeah. That's a real problem.

The seven walked along a cracked road, the pavement split

wide like empty veins across the earth. Some buildings were missing whole sections. Others leaned against each other like tired giants holding each other up.

The war had absolutely destroyed this place.

Everywhere: distant roars, the flap of leathery wings, monster footsteps echoing off ruins.

Ella glanced around nervously. "Starla... Are you sure about this? This place does not look friendly."

Starla didn't even blink. "I don't care if we have to go through monsters themselves. We're helping them in Celestia. I know what I'm doing."

They pushed through the wreckage. No Soundanites in sight. No normal life left here.

Some building lights still flickered. Power lines crackled like the last sparks from a dead engine. Starla wasn't fazed. She kept moving, locked in. Focused.

They walked beneath the shadow of a crumbling building until they stopped in front of a tall, rectangular structure. The sign above was barely readable through all the grime: **MUSICIA GAS.**

The gas station was somehow still standing. Barely.

The green paint was covered in mud and rust. The windows were long gone—just broken glass everywhere. The walls inside were white once, maybe, but now grime coated everything. Leaves were scattered across the floor like a crunchy carpet.

Starla stared up at the building, then exhaled hard and turned away, hands on her hips.

"How are we even gonna find this place?"

Olsen crossed his arms, sitting on a chunk of broken concrete. "It's the tallest building here. How do you not know where it is?"

Starla snapped, "Well, it's not like you know!"

"Hey—guys. Chill," Prince cut in, raising his hands. "We all know Musicia's tallest building is hidden now. Between the damage and everything leaning on it? Of course it's hard to find."

Starla's face dropped. "Sorry for snapping. I just..." Her voice lowered. "I miss someone."

She sat down, tail swishing softly behind her, glowing faint blue and purple.

Ella walked over, hand on Starla's shoulder. "...Don's gonna be alright."

Starla nodded. "I know..."

They all got quiet for a moment. Archie stared up at the sky. Violet clouds swirled above, lightning arcing through them like electric veins.

"HUT TWO THREE FOUR! HUT TWO THREE FOUR!"

The shout echoed through the ruins. Everyone froze.

"Inside, now!" Olsen hissed.

The seven sprinted inside the gas station, ducking under windows, crouching low behind walls and empty shelves.

Footsteps. Stomping in sync. Getting closer.

Then: "AND HALT!"

The marching stopped. Starla slowly peeked up through the broken window.

Real Lunaranite soldiers.

Not the Power Gem fakes. The real deal—lined up perfectly, holding bows, spears, guns. Standing in formation, and in front of them: someone different.

A tall figure raised his spear high.

"OUR LEADER, KING DREADIXZ, HAS FALLEN TO THE CHOSEN ONE'S WRATH!" His voice thundered through the streets. "AFTER THE POWER GEMS BURST THROUGH AVANGARD, FAKE

LUNARANITES FELL TO EARTH! OUR MISSION IS TO FIND AT LEAST ONE TO HONOR THE KING!"

"HONOR TO THE KING!" the soldiers roared.

Their leader wore a metal dog muzzle and a sharp-eared helmet shaped like a dog's head. His armor was deep purple, marked with swirling Celtic patterns. Red glowing eyes stared straight ahead.

Then—

He turned toward the gas station.

Starla dropped instantly, ducking out of sight. Her legs shook. Her breath caught in her throat.

She knew him. She remembered everything.

Dreadlock.

- **Dreadlock** — Copy Element
- *Dreadixz's personal meatrider and a little wild.*

Third-in-command of the Lunaranites. Not as strong as Dark Don or King Dreadixz—but smart. Deadly.

Leathery black wings. Leathery black tail. Power Mimicry Element. He could copy anyone's powers for two hours—then wait twelve hours before doing it again. Worse, he could straight-up steal someone's Element for thirty minutes, ripping it right out of them.

His villain name wasn't just a name. It was who he was since birth.

Dreadlock had been a problem since Starla was a kid. One of the big three threats alongside Dark Don and King Dreadixz.

There were at least twenty soldiers out there.

Archie sat next to Demaurion, wings twitching nervously.

She peeked again.

Dreadlock was still there—talking, pacing, throwing around war commands or politics or whatever he was on about.

But Starla had an idea.

If she was going to get to the tallest building in Musicia... she'd have to do it without being seen. No mistakes. No second chances.

That building wasn't just tall. It was hanging by a thread. One wrong move and it'd collapse.

But if she didn't do it?

The risk for everyone else was even worse.

At the Great War of Celestia

The battlefield of Celestia was nearly empty. No sunlight. Just a red, smoky sky choked with thick sheets of gas and clouds.

The sky looked like Scarletsville's dark, sick orange, like something was burning forever.

There was no sun. Smoke swallowed it whole.

The ground? Total ruin. Blood everywhere splattered, smeared, oozing from the bodies of Lunaranites and Celestianites alike.

Buildings were crumbled, cracked, bent out of shape, twisted like metal in a nightmare. Some leaned and creaked, groaning under their own weight.

Even now, some Celestianites were still out there fighting, spears and old-world rifles in hand.

The Lunaranites fought back harder. Claws. Teeth. More fake Lunaranites rained down from the sky, rolling across the ground like beasts, flipping back onto all fours like animals possessed.

Roars and screams swallowed the air. Explosions raced across

the battlefield like lightning, one after another.

A Celestianite stabbed a Lunaranite in mid-air, only to get stabbed from behind two seconds later.

The sky wasn't even sky anymore. It was packed, millions of alien birds flying through all that smoke and fire.

Flames lit up everything. Gunshots, yells, elemental clashes, monster roars. All of it at once.

Blood poured from soldier's mouths, from gaping wounds, like their bodies were trying to escape themselves.

And the Power Gems? They were almost there, glowing closer and closer to the Celestial Pillars.

The only light left in the sky came from a single beam, a bright, lightning-blue ray blasting up from the top of Celestia's Castle, punching through the clouds like a beacon.

All through the shattered Chanted Kingdom, buildings leaned and collapsed. Glass shattered. Fires burned endlessly. Cars smashed, flipped, wrecked, lined the streets like metal tombstones.

A full-on war zone.

Only two figures left standing: Dark Don and Jaylen.

Jaylen was on the ground. Blood dripping from his mouth. Wings twitching. Tail barely moving. His hair hung messy over his face, cut up and bruised all over.

Slowly, he lifted his head, just enough to look up at Dark Don standing over him, smirking.

Dark Don's fists crackled with lunar energy, bright and dangerous, making the very air around him rumble like thunder waiting to hit.

He stood there, listening to the chaos, the screaming, the explosions, the monster roars. Then he looked down at Jaylen again.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk... You could've done better, couldn't you?"

Jaylen coughed hard. Blood hit the dirt. His voice came slow and ragged. "I did my best though..."

Dark Don crouched, leaning down closer, eyes glowing. His voice dropped quiet.

"This is war, kid. Of course you tried. But maybe your best just wasn't enough."

He stood back up, gaze shifting over his shoulder toward the battlefield.

The sky was still crowded with alien birds. And on the far edge of the warzone, Jaylen's crew was still fighting, swinging, slashing, blasting their Elements, their beast powers.

Dark Don tilted his head, like he was sizing it all up.

"What are you gonna do now? Your friends are out there. Fighting an army of monsters. I bet they're getting tired..."

Jaylen's head twitched up again, eyes burning through blood and dirt.

"They'll never get tired of fighting for what's right," he muttered, voice low but steady.

Slowly, shaking, Jaylen pushed himself to his feet. His armor was cracked and nearly destroyed.

But he was still standing.

He wiped blood from his face, teeth clenched, eyes locked on Dark Don.

"Because with this..."

His voice snapped sharp. His energy flared. Cyan and yellow sparks danced around him.

"...IT ENDS NOW."

| #1.37 — “You really do hate me, huh?” |

Jaylen threw a punch—but Dark Don caught it like it weighed nothing.

A massive shockwave exploded outward, tearing at the air. Reality shivered. The ground seemed to twist, buildings bending like wet paper.

Then—black.

Pure void. No sky. No ground. Just Jaylen. Just Dark Don. Frozen mid-fight, suspended in nothingness.

Dark Don still gripped Jaylen’s fist. His smirk curdled into a scowl.

“Really... do hate me, huh?”

His fingers tightened. Jaylen’s hand shattered like fragile glass. Fragments floated around him, glittering like broken stars. Pain cut sharp, white-hot.

BAM!

The city reappeared. War-torn, smoking, crumbling. Jaylen hit the ground, eyes squinting against dust and fire, tears escaping—not from grief, but raw pain.

Dark Don drew back his other fist. Lunar energy spiraled and crackled around him, painting the air silver and purple.

“Time to leave, Celestianite...”

BAM!

Angel rocketed in, an uppercut that lifted Dark Don straight into the sky. Glasses glinting, voice cutting like steel:

"THERE'S MORE WHERE THAT CAME FROM!"

He spun, tornado kick blasting through the battlefield, sending Dark Don flying ragdoll-style. He smashed through buildings, ricocheted off cars, bounced through the air like a pinball.

CRAAAAAASH!

A rusty tower took the brunt. Groaning metal, dust exploding like a volcanic eruption. QUUUIINCH! CRRRAAAANK! The tower folded in half.

"ANGEL?! YOU SAVED ME!" Jaylen coughed blood, clutching his arm.

Angel's face hardened into seriousness Jaylen had never seen.

"I know... and I brought backup."

Blinking, Jaylen barely whispered, "Backup? What do you mean—"

Through the dust, they stepped forward.

The crew. Bruised. Bloodied. Weapons glowing. Elements crackling. Eyes burning determination.

Angel at the front, serious as a storm. Behind him, tired grins, sharp little smirks, the kind that said: we're not done.

Jaylen grinned through the blood. Dream Energy flared around him. They weren't tired. They weren't broken.

Even Anhia held an alien bird's head like a trophy. They were here. Pre-Heroes... ready to become legends.

Dark Don's low growl split the air.

"Is that all of them?"

Angel shook his head, grinning.

"Nope. That's not all..."

BOOOOOOM!

The ground quaked. Something massive crashed through the

ruins.

Kai.

The Hric had grown colossal under Eldritch's potion, ears smacking buildings, red eyes glowing like molten rubies, teeth flashing.

And riding him—Power. Back like a storm. Fists raised, voice roaring over the chaos:

"WE'VE COME TO KICK SOME LUNARANITE ASS!!"

Thunderclap of a roar. BOOM.

ncarceration teleported in, armor upgraded, red streaks pulsing. One arm a cannon, energy humming like wildfire. Eyes glowing through the visor.

He scanned the battlefield—Power, Kai, the crew, Celestianites fighting above.

"Power... are we really doing this right now?" His voice was low, simmering with fury, red energy crackling like storm lightning.

He stepped forward. The air warped around him. "We've been fighting a long time... and now's the time for you to give up this land."

His voice rose, a scream across ruins:

"JUST LOOK AT IT! WHAT'S THE POINT OF WAR?! IF WE'RE GONNA TAKE THIS PLACE AND TEAR IT DOWN—WE'LL DO IT WITH OUR OWN BLOODY HANDS!"

Red-hot eyes. Stomp that shook the rubble underfoot.

"TELL ME, POWER! WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOU STILL HAVE A CHANCE TO SAVE CELESTIA?! IT'S OVER! DONE! AND IF YOU STILL WANT TO FIGHT—"

He flung both arms wide.

"LET'S FIGHT!!!"

Silence. A heartbeat. Then the chaos of battle roared back.

Power and Incarceration—face to face. Every muscle coiled. Every instinct screaming. Around them, beasts and fake Lunaranites surged, charging like predators straight from the wild.

Power muttered, calm but cutting:

"Yes."

Incarceration slammed his fists into the ground.

BOOOOM.

The world tore apart. Shockwaves flattened Celestia. Buildings launched skyward, twisting mid-air like ragdolls. The sky itself screamed:

BWWWWOOOOOMMM! WOOOSH!

The battlefield vanished.

He fired.

A red inferno arced toward the crew. Everyone dove, elements flaring, weapons igniting.

The crew ran headfirst into chaos. Incarceration's cannon roared, each blast a furious thunderclap. Smoke and debris swirled like a living storm, every explosion illuminating madness in crimson and shadow.

He grabbed Ryan, slammed him into Anhia; sent Lonnie Mae flying into the air. The ground cracked under the force.

Emely wasn't done, blood left near her cheek. "I'LL GET YOU RED MEANIE!"

She leapt, trident glittering, ice forming along her arms. She latched onto the cannon, grunting and swinging—but Incarceration thrashed, tossing her off like a ragdoll.

Before he could recover, Guervens dropped from the clouds, magma spikes blasting him skyward. Wings unfurled, jets flaring, he rocketed like a missile, laughter slicing the roar. Anhia unleashed diamond shards after him, glittering like deadly rain.

Incarceration twisted through smoke-choked air, firing relentlessly. Craters blossomed with each impact, shockwaves rippling outward like a pulse from a dying star.

Power.

A blue comet of energy slammed into him mid-air. BOOM. Sparks cascaded across the battlefield. Power crushed Incarceration into the ground, azure light painting the horizon like a storm.

Incarceration staggered, rose, fists blazing crimson, blasting Power back, but he didn't falter.

From above, William swooped, Pterodactyl wings slicing wind, compressed gusts slamming Incarceration. Nightmare energy flared. Shockwave rippled back, tossing William across the battlefield.

A white glow streaked toward the Room of Zeniths Tower, Celestial Pillars glowing ominously. Grin spreading... until Power returned, lightspeed right hook CRACKing against Incarceration.

He tumbled, meteor-like, unleashing a massive crimson beam—BOOM—scorching the land.

Lonnie Mae's vines lashed his cannon, yanking him down. Blast shattered them, laughter echoing.

Jaylen struck. Dream Punch to the back, launching him skyward.

Kwa'asja's green barrier flared, deflecting his wild shots with a thunderous boom. Sophia sprinted, Kai at her heels.

"...Shit," he muttered.

"TAKE THIS!!" Cannon unleashed rapid-fire rounds, slam Kai, block Angel's tornado kick, spin Sophia like a living battering ram.

Incarceration was everywhere, teleporting, elbowing, smash-

ing, slashing. Shurikens shattered, Mason's dough strings snapped like threads.

Power surged forward, faster than thought, cyan energy blazing. Punching through monsters, obliterating beasts, a blur of pure force.

He leapt—collision imminent.

BOOOOM. Red-and-blue shockwave cratered the land. Dust swallowed the battlefield.

Yet Incarceration stood. One hand gripping Power's fists, crushing Mason's bindings. Maniacal grin:

"Oh, how I love when you kids play..."

Arms wide:

"THIS ISN'T JUST A RAID. THIS IS BLOOD FOR BLOOD!"

Strings snapped. Punches thundered. Explosions bloomed crimson and azure across the ruins. Power rocketed overhand—BOOM—shockwave tore land apart. He spun, crashed, slammed back by Mason, wrestling-style.

Incarceration laughed, cannon charging. KRAK-KOOM! Ground split, stadium-sized crater forming, red fire raining down.

He slammed William mid-air, combo-punched Kai, uppercutted Jocabed, hurled Emely into a mountain. Slashes, hurricane kicks, blasts—he was unstoppable.

Then he rocketed skyward like a missile, surveying chaos from above.

Kayson stomped, Kai crushed beasts, Jaylen flew, dragon form blazing.

Jaylen tackled him mid-air—BOOM—spiraling upward, claws and fists clashing in a maelstrom.

"GRAAAHH!!" Jaylen roared. "YOU'RE GONNA DIE!!!"

Spiraling down like a comet, punches, roars, claws colliding

mid-fall.

"ENOUGH!" Incarceration blasted point-blank—a red-ring explosion tearing the sky.

He snapped to Kayson, firing again and again... KABOOM! Titan shattered back to base form.

Incarceration crashed into the battlefield, blood, dust, debris everywhere.

But one figure remained, Jaylen.

Limping, wings battered, tail nearly severed. Body screaming in pain. Eyes burning bright.

"You're not winning, Incarceration..." he muttered through gritted teeth.

"...Just wait... till they come."

| #1.38 — Chaotic Minds of Chaos |

We stayed crouched behind the window for what felt like forever—waiting, not breathing, making sure they didn't see us.

It really dragged. The sky stayed dark and dim, thunder rumbling, lightning ripping through the clouds like wild veins of light. Wind howled sharp enough to cut. Shadows drifted through the air, swirling like ghosts.

Behind us, we could hear the Lunaranite soldiers chanting: "All hail King Dreadixz." And that's when I started hearing things. Memories. Echoes from the people around me, voices in my head.

I tried to block it out, focus. The windows were shattered wide open. The whole building was buried under heaps of leaves, spread across the floor like someone tried to hide the place under autumn. Dust and mud caked the walls.

Now me, Starla, I needed a plan. After glancing up at the massive tower standing tall in the center of Musicia, I knew. I had to escape. Help everyone win this war. Yeah, maybe my Astral Element isn't the flashiest. But it's useful. It worked against Duke, didn't it?

The point of the plan: Get there without the Lunaranites or Dreadlock spotting us. Escape. Fight back. I leaned toward Ella,

whispering, "Alright, I've got something that'll get us out of here and to Celestia fast." "What is it?" she whispered back.

I explained, low and serious: "Prince, Archie, and Demaurion will distract them. Me, you, Olsen, and Eli head to the tower. Eli covers us while they're getting chased. Then Olsen throws us to the top, where the golden stars are. Once the others catch up, I'll use my tendrils and horns to pull everyone up. Then we escape to Celestia, stairs should be there.

Ella nodded and passed it on to Archie, who nodded to Demaurion, who nodded to Prince, then Olsen, then Eli. Everyone got it.

I peeked up through the shattered window. The soldiers were still locked in formation—four by four. Dreadlock stood right in front. Suddenly, Dreadlock turned toward the window.

I ducked fast, heart hammering, hand over my mouth. A long few seconds passed. He turned away. I exhaled hard, glancing back at the crew. Everyone was ready, Elemental powers crackling around them like quiet storms.

I looked through the empty doorway. Loose papers and metal scraps blew in from the wind. Eyes narrowed. I looked at Prince, Demaurion, Archie. A smirk crawled across my face. Astral energy surged through my arms and face, cyan and yellow tendrils lighting me up. "You heard the plan, NOW GO!"

The tendrils whipped out and grabbed them. Prince blinked, confused. "WAIT, WAIT, HOLD UP—I WASN'T READY—" "TOO LATE!" I shouted, flinging all three of them straight through the window.

They screamed, flying sideways through the air and hitting the ground with a heavy grunt. Prince stood up slow... right in front of Dreadlock. The Lunaranites all stared. Blank. Puzzled. Prince froze. Demaurion and Archie already had their weapons

drawn. Prince cleared his throat.

"Uhh... Squawk. I'm a bird." One soldier raised his musket. Prince's voice cracked, sweating:

"Squawk. Squawk. I'm just a bird that looks like a human. You're, uh... imagining things."

A few seconds later—"AHHH! YOU GUYS ARE SHOOTING AN INNOCENT CIVILIAN! I'M AN AVANGARDIAN! I'M AN ELEMENTANITE!" he screamed, tearing off through the city like a bright blue blur.

Archie launched into the sky, fire blazing below storm clouds. "CHOKE ON THIS!" he yelled, firing a massive fireball. Demaurion blasted it down with water.

"Not now, Archie!"

Meanwhile, me, Ella, Olsen, and Eli sprinted out of the gas station, weaving through ruined buildings. The whole city leaned sideways, buildings slumped like wounded giants.

I leapt over fallen walls, gunshots echoing behind us, and I could still hear Prince's voice begging for his life. We ran harder. Sliding rooftops. Crashing through alleys. The city felt haunted, half-dead, monsters creeping in the shadows. We dropped down in the middle of four buildings.

"Great, great, GREAT—what now?!" I snapped. Eli pointed up. The tower. That was it. We sprinted again, dodging busted cars, debris everywhere. Olsen smashed through walls like nothing, clearing our path.

A fake Lunaranite dragon dropped in front of us. Massive. Jaws wide, teeth sharp enough to split metal. We froze. It crept closer. Wings flared. Beady eyes locked on us.

Eli didn't hesitate, teleported right in front, slashing with his Wyvern claws. The beast collapsed, blood spraying out. Coast clear.

Prince and the others kept fighting. Prince blurred through the streets, thunder cracked, and the rain hit.

Water gushed through buildings, sweeping fake Lunaranites away. Demaurion controlled the wave, steering it toward empty buildings, smashing everything in its path. I squinted through the storm—we're close.

"WE'RE CLOSE!" I yelled. Hair soaked. Wings heavy. Didn't matter. An alien bird aimed its cannons.

Bullets ripped through the air. We ducked. Olsen shouted, "I GOT THIS!" and hurled his hammer. Direct hit. The bird spiraled down, blood spraying, crashed hard.

The hammer came back, Olsen caught it like a boss. "WE MADE IT!" he yelled. We looked up. The tower loomed above, rusty, crooked, shattered windows. It creaked like it might fall any second. But it was huge, bigger than anything around it.

"Now we just need to get up there, come on, Olsen!" Ella called. Olsen grabbed me and Ella launched us. Full Earth-powered strength. We flew through hot, smoky air, stinking of ash. I looked down, Fake Lunaranites rushed Olsen and Eli.

"OLSEN! ELI! WATCH OUT!" Olsen spun, hammer to the ground—A rocky shockwave exploded out, stone spikes rising like a fortress.

Prince blurred around the battlefield. Demaurion sent waves crashing. Archie threw fire. Dreadlock lit up, stolen Fire Element burning from his arms.

Flames exploded toward Archie.

Buildings cracked, leaned, snapped in half. Debris flying everywhere.

"GUYS! LEFT!" Ella screamed. Olsen turned—Eli froze time. The debris hung mid-air—suspended. Only for a second. He couldn't hold it long.

Ella and I landed hard on the rooftop. I almost fell. Caught myself. Eli was struggling—

I yanked both him and Olsen up with my tendrils. They landed beside us. I turned, Prince, Demaurion, Archie, still down there, fighting. I grabbed my horns tight. They started humming. A mythical tune. Indigo glow.

I closed my eyes. Focused. Pulled them up toward us. When I opened my eyes, they were already there. Lunaranites looked confused as hell. Behind us, golden stairs. Wide as a mansion. Glowing. Forged by King Vigilzante himself.

The wind still carried screams, both Lunaranite and Celestianite. "COME ON, COME ON! LET'S GET OUT BEFORE WE ALL DIE, MOVE!" Demaurion yelled, racing up.

Everyone followed. Archie grinned, "LET ME LEAVE A PRESENT!" He launched one last explosion, the whole city shook.

Ash everywhere. One by one, they leapt into the sky through the opening clouds.

And me, I stopped. Turned back. Looked down at Musicia. Once alive. Now burned. Ashes.

A memory hit me. Hard.

I grabbed my head, shook it off—And jumped through the entrance after them.

My knees slammed into the hard, stone-like ground. Eyes shot open, blinding white. A void. A realm of nothing. And I was completely alone. No Archie. No Prince, Demaurion, Olsen, Ella, or Eli. Just me.

I rose slowly, dust scattering from my clothes like sparks from a fire gone mad. The void stretched forever, blank and endless. "Where... am I?" I whispered, shivering. "I was just in a fight.

Why the hell am I here?"

Everything before this was a blur, too fast to grasp, like raindrops on glass. My mind spun in circles. Was it too much? Was it all—

"Starla."

That voice, echoing through the white nothing. I whipped my head. "Hello?" My stomach flipped. That voice... wise, heroic... my dad?

Then he appeared. Far ahead, arms wide, golden armor glinting like molten sun, purple cape flowing like liquid amethyst. Eyes glowing yellow, beard thick and white, sword shimmering with the Celestianite Emblem.

"D-DAD!" I sprinted. Tears streaked my face. Inches away, I threw my arms around him—

Nothing. Gone. Never there.

Then—voices, "Starla! Starla?"

"Starla, are you okay?!"

Blink. The void shattered. I yelped.

We were on the Celestia Bridge. Golden highway stretched beneath us, shimmering gold and amber. Cars streaked past like comets. Dusty orange sky. Smoke and gas curling in spirals overhead. Blood and scorch marks stained the pavement. Golden towers rose like jagged teeth. Cyber-cars and bikes screamed past, engines shrieking louder than alien birds.

I grabbed my head. Ella steadied me. "You okay?"

"I... I thought I saw my dad," I whispered. "But... he wasn't real."

I saw it, a gray van, glowing blue markings, cannons perched on the roof like jagged ice. Olsen squinted. "I don't know what that is, but—*aaaaand* there it is."

Above us: Lunaranites and Celestianites brawling mid-air.

Spears, bullets, blood—chaos dripping in slow motion, streaks of violet, crimson, and gold painting the sky.

BOOM. Heavy stomps. Getting closer.

"You guys hear that?" My heartbeat raced.

Demaurion crossed his arms. "I don't hear anyth—"

ROARS!! Cars flew like toys. Metal crunched. Glass shattered. Three giant black bloodhounds, striped in red like demonic tigers, charged.

Prince whispered, "Oh... snickerdoodles."

I spun. "AH! WHAT ARE THOSE—THOSE THINGS?!"

The beasts charged. Closer. Faster.

Olsen's eyes locked on the van. Without a word, he sprinted, yanked open the door, yanked the wheel. Ella shouted, "OLSEN, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!"

"GET IN! WE'RE GUNNING IT!"

We dove in. The van glowed cyan inside. Buttons lit up like a digital galaxy.

"ALRIGHT!" Olsen barked. "WE LOSE THESE MONSTERS AND FLOOR IT!"

He slammed the pedal. Van shot forward. Bloodhounds smashed cars aside like toys. Prince peeked out the back window. "FLOOR FASTER! THEY'RE THROWING A TANTRUM!"

Olsen swerved, tires screaming. Click. Cannons spun.

"PRINCE—TAKE THE SHOTS!"

"WHY—"

"***DO IT!***"

Olsen barked again, "ARCHIE, BURN 'EM! DEMAURION, LIGHT 'EM UP!"

Prince shot upward, electricity crackling like neon veins. Demaurion got launched too—both now on mounted cannons. Prince panicked at first. "WHY DOES THIS ALWAYS HAPPEN TO

M—"

But then Eli shot his head out of the windows, shattering glass and glowing with time-energy. With a flick of his hands, he signed at us while tiny ripples of green rewind energy circled him. Time bent, slowed, the bullet arcs reversed, the bloodhounds' strides stuttered and rewound a heartbeat, giving us a split-second edge.

Prince locked in. "SHOOT HERE! SHOOT THERE! SHOOT HERE!!" Bullets flew in colored trails—blue, silver, crimson. One beast hurled a car. I yelled, "OLSEN SWER—!"

Olsen drifted expertly, the van weaving through shattered cars. Archie launched fireballs, red-orange sparks streaking like liquid suns. Demaurion fired relentlessly, icy blue flames lancing the beasts.

Eli's hands moved, signing intricate commands. A green shimmer traced the air, reversing certain explosions, unmaking destroyed vehicles just enough to trap the monsters in a loop. Colors collided—gold, cyan, violet, crimson—painting the chaos like a living tapestry.

The two-legged beast hurled cars. Another fired a beam. Prince's lightning tendrils lashed the pavement, sliding across sparks, electricity dancing with neon cyan from Eli's time-bend.

"ARCHIE! BLOW IT UP!"

Flames erupted. Metal twisted. Blood and fire mixed into streaks of orange and magenta. BOOM! One final explosion swallowed the monsters. Highway lit in violent hues, then silence.

Prince flipped back onto the van, grinning. "HELL YEAH! THAT'S HOW YOU KNOW WE'RE GOATED! **THAT'S. HOW. YOU. KNOW. WE'RE GOATED!**"

Demaurion and Archie jumped in. Olsen swerved with a laugh.

"HA HAH! YEAH! THAT WAS THE HARDEST WE COOKED THIS oFMONTH!" But ahead—Celestianites and Lunaranites, locked in battle. And there... Incarceration, tearing through the crew like it was nothing.

"I FOUND OUR STOP!" Olsen shouted, drifting into the fight. Van launched into the air. Fire below, debris spinning like stars. Door kicked open.

We stepped out, legends in motion. Prince sparked, Archie burned, Demaurion poised, Ella ready, Eli glowed, hands still tracing the time-energy sigils, light rippling like liquid green.

We were back. And this time? Nothing could stop us.

| #1.39 — War Never Meant Done |

The seven stood before the van as smoke drifted upward in slow spirals, flames reflecting across the ruined battlefield. Burned metal cracked. Embers floated through the air like dying stars. Around the cratered wasteland, Class 101 stood battle-worn and bloodied, surrounding Incarceration while Jaylen stared him dead in the eyes.

Incarceration walked slowly across the blackened earth, boots grinding through ash, blood, and shattered stone. His head hung low. Red light flickered violently across his ruined suit as his cannon pulsed with a soft mechanical hum, casting crimson across the battlefield.

Everyone watched him.

Waiting.

Watching for the slightest movement.

Watching for the moment he decided to kill them all.

But Incarceration wasn't nervous.

He was a Zenith.

To him, destruction wasn't difficult.

It was natural.

"You're going to deal with this every single day," Incarceration said calmly, his voice carrying through the wind while fists clenched and energy crackled around the battlefield. "This is

what your job is as Heroes."

He slowly turned toward the group—the Chosen Ones, Starla, Eli, the entirety of Class 101.

Then he sighed.

Actually sighed.

Spreading his arms wide, he scoffed, "Come on, everybody. Can't we be a little more rational?"

His cannon glowed brighter.

"Killing the Chosen Ones is easy for me."

He pointed directly at them.

"They're right there."

Olsen tightened his grip on his hammer.

Prince lowered into a runner's stance, lightning snapping around his body.

Archie's skin ignited with blazing fire.

Demaurion boiled the moisture in the air itself, pressure distorting around him in violent waves.

Incarceration noticed Starla and Eli standing among them and chuckled under his breath.

"A Lost Celestianite princess... and a Nomanite."

Then his eyes swept over the rest of Class 101.

"And the rest of you are just kids in costumes trying to play Hero."

His voice hardened.

"This is serious."

The battlefield trembled slightly beneath his feet.

"You're all on the verge of losing this world while I'm already taking over Celestia. There's no stopping me now."

"We can."

Jaylen stepped forward.

Dream energy spiraled around his fists in violet and silver

currents as he stared directly into Incarceration's glowing eyes.

"If all of us jump you at once," Jaylen said steadily, "we can overpower you."

He exhaled slowly.

"You're not invincible, Incarceration."

The battlefield quieted.

"You're strong."

His fists tightened.

"But you're not stronger than all of us."

The Zenith blinked once.

Then again.

His cannon slowly began lifting toward Jaylen's head.

"So... I'm not strong to you?"

The cannon's whirring intensified.

This wasn't about disproving Jaylen's statement.

It was about destroying their hope.

"Mentally," Incarceration whispered, "you're all weak."

The cannon glowed brighter.

"I already proved it."

BRRRRRRMMMMMM—

"And all of you saw it."

The crimson light intensified until the battlefield itself turned red.

Several heroes instinctively stepped back.

Jaylen didn't move.

Dream energy crackled violently around him as he shut his eyes, waiting for the blast.

SKRAAAAAASH!!!

A jagged arc of blazing blue lightning tore across the battlefield.

The wind detonated outward.

The earth shook.

Everyone's eyes widened as a blue streak ripped through reality itself—

Power.

Moving so fast the world barely kept up with him.

His eyes blazed azure.

Energy exploded from both fists as his cape whipped violently behind him.

He reeled his arm back.

"OVERPOWERED OVERHAND!!!"

BAAAAAAAAAAMMMMMM!!!!

The impact detonated across the battlefield in a catastrophic blue shockwave.

Mountains shattered instantly.

The ground split open.

Wind warped and screamed across the landscape as Incarceration was launched skyward, flipping uncontrollably while blood sprayed through the air behind him.

He smashed through a mountain in an explosion of debris before crashing into the earth below.

But Power was already above the clouds.

A blazing blue comet streaked across the heavens before diving back downward like a celestial missile.

Energy spiraled around him in violent torrents as he spun through the air, weaving between thunderclouds.

"SERIOUS—"

WARP—FLASH!

"—KICK!!!!!"

BASHKKKKKKK!!!!

The kick connected.

Blue shockwaves erupted in every direction as the storm itself

turned azure. Lightning lashed across the sky while power engulfed the battlefield whole.

Power vanished.

Incarceration staggered backward through the smoke, blood pouring from his nose as cracks spread across his cannon.

FLASH!

Power appeared directly in front of him.

His fist curled back.

A glowing blue dimensional fracture shattered open behind him.

"SPLIT—"

IMPACT FRAME.

"REMINDER OF TRUTH!!!"

BWHOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMM!!!!

The punch slammed into Incarceration's face with enough force to fracture the air itself.

A glowing red crack spread across the Zenith's eye.

"RRAAAAGGHHHHHHHHHHH!!!"

The battlefield exploded into blue light.

Mountains collapsed.

Gravity distorted.

Entire slabs of earth ripped upward into the air as the storm lost control around them.

WHOOSHHH!!!

Incarceration shot skyward again—

—but Power instantly appeared above him and drove him back down with another catastrophic smash that turned the sky white.

The Zenith hit the ground hard enough to split the continent beneath them.

Power descended with him.

BOOOOOOM!!!

The land shattered apart completely.

Molten lava glowed beneath the collapsing earth.

Now both brothers floated above a fractured world.

Power crossed his arms, glaring downward with glowing eyes filled with anger and disappointment.

Across from him, Incarceration hovered silently over the lava-lit abyss.

His armor was cracked.

Blood dripped from his mouth.

But his eyes remained sharp.

Power stared directly at him.

"I can't even be shocked anymore."

Blood spilled from Incarceration's nose into the burning air below.

Then he looked at his brother.

"Power... we've already had this conversation."

His voice lowered.

"This is what I want."

The sky rumbled.

"I want Avangard to suffer."

The lava beneath them bubbled violently.

"They think they're safe. Protected. Comfortable."

His eyes glowed red.

"They need to learn the hard way."

"You don't have to do this," Power replied.

The battlefield quieted.

For the first time since the fight began...

They sounded like brothers again.

"We're family," Power said quietly. "And when it comes to genocide... corrupting the Power Gems... turning fear into

hatred…"

He shook his head.

"I understand fear exists. But this?"

His cape drifted through the smoke-filled sky.

"This isn't justice."

The connection between them became suffocatingly real.

Pain.

History.

Regret.

Power's voice softened.

"We were born to help people."

His eyes locked onto Incarceration's.

"You want to psychologically destroy Avangard because you want the world to feel the pain you felt for years."

The words hit harder than any punch.

"But that doesn't mean you have to become this."

Silence.

"It's my fault you were treated this way," Power admitted.

The wind slowed.

"But I won't help you destroy the world because of it."

He took a slow breath.

"You need to figure this out yourself."

Incarceration stared at him quietly.

Power continued.

"We're Heroes."

Blue light flickered around him.

"Zeniths aren't supposed to destroy people mentally. We're supposed to save them."

The red glow around Incarceration's cannon dimmed slightly.

"And I understand if you want to be your own person," Power said. "But it doesn't give you the right to spread pain to everyone

else."

A pause.

"You're not gonna punch me again over this?"

The question sounded almost human.

Power slowly shook his head.

"I'm not gonna punch you."

Incarceration looked down at the lava beneath them.

His eyes flickered.

Red.

Blue.

Red.

Blue.

Then finally—

Blue.

Power froze.

Those blue eyes.

The eyes he hadn't seen in years.

The eyes of his brother.

Power snapped his fingers.

BOOOOM!

The shattered earth sealed shut beneath them as the lava disappeared and the land reformed.

Power almost smiled through tears.

And for the first time in forever—

Incarceration smiled back.

A real smile.

Peaceful.

Free.

Power floated closer.

Slowly.

Carefully.

Then the two embraced.

For one brief moment—

The war stopped.

Incarceration's eyes flickered red.

"...Fuck you."

SHHHHKKKK!!!

The cannon ignited point-blank.

Power's eyes widened.

BWAAAAAAAAAAMMMMMMMMMM!!!!

A nightmare-red beam consumed him whole.

The battlefield erupted into crimson devastation as Power was blasted downward through the earth, smashing into the land below inside a colossal dome of exploding red energy.

The shockwave swallowed everything.

Silence followed.

Smoke slowly rose from the massive crater.

High above it all, Incarceration floated motionless.

No smile.

No laughter.

No satisfaction.

He simply stared down at Power's unconscious body far below.

The wind passed quietly around him.

FWSSSHHHH!!!

A violet-and-silver blast ripped through the sky.

Jaylen's Dream Blast slammed directly into Incarceration's side mid-air, detonating in a violent spiral of dream energy that twisted the clouds apart.

Incarceration's eyes widened as the explosion hurled him sideways through the storm.

Jaylen hovered in the air below him, battered wings spread wide, blood running down his face while dream energy spiraled

around both fists.

His voice trembled with rage.

"You don't get to do that to him."

The battlefield drowned in smoke.

Crimson embers drifted through the air like dying stars while ruined towers collapsed in the distance, their remains swallowed by fire. The sky itself looked infected—dark clouds churning around streaks of unstable red lightning.

And at the center of it all stood Incarceration.

Unmoving.

His cannon smoked softly at his side.

The crater Power left behind still burned behind him, molten rock bubbling deep beneath the fractured earth. For a moment, he stared at it in silence.

No grin.

No satisfaction.

Just silence.

Then his jaw tightened.

"...See?" he muttered quietly, almost to himself. "This is why weakness has to die."

His voice shook slightly at the end.

Barely noticeable.

But it was there.

His glowing red eyes flickered downward toward the crater one final time before hardening again.

"You hesitate once," he said louder, turning toward the remaining heroes, "and the world tears you apart for it."

The survivors glared at him through blood and exhaustion.

Ella struggled to stand.

Demaurion's scales steamed violently.

Jaylen's wings twitched weakly behind him.

Keyler wiped blood from his mouth while tightening the silver strings wrapped around his wrists.

Incarceration slowly lifted his head.

"You all still think this ends with hope."

Red energy pulsed through the cracks in his armor.

"But hope is what gets people killed."

BOOOOOOM!!!

He moved.

A red explosion detonated outward as Incarceration shot through the battlefield like a missile.

Ryan barely lifted his weapon before a crimson beam punched through the ground beneath him, launching him screaming through burning debris.

Sophia unleashed a massive wave of sound—

—but Incarceration caught it.

The soundwave folded backward violently and exploded into her chest, sending her spiraling helplessly into the sky.

Angel opened three portals at once—

WHAM!!!

Incarceration backhanded him straight through his own gateway.

Emely rushed from behind with frozen fists—

CRACK!!!

His metal fist smashed across her face hard enough to spin her sideways through shattered stone.

Fedjina lunged—

—but the cannon swung once.

BAAAAM!!!

She vanished into smoke and rubble.

The battlefield collapsed into panic again.

William roared and charged forward through the flames.

Incarceration turned toward him lazily.

Almost annoyed.

The cannon reshaped instantly—

SHHHKKKKK!!!

—and unleashed a gigantic red blast.

The explosion swallowed half the battlefield whole.

The earth trembled.

Wind screamed outward in all directions.

William disappeared into the detonation.

Metal boots scraped against broken stone as Incarceration marched forward through the firestorm.

Then his hand shot out—

GRAB!

Olsen choked as Incarceration seized him by the collar and slammed him into the ground with catastrophic force.

BOOOOM!!!

Shockwaves burst outward.

Olsen coughed blood violently as cracks spread beneath his body.

Incarceration's cannon reformed into an enormous artillery weapon above him, glowing brighter and brighter as it aimed downward.

"You people keep surviving things you shouldn't," Incarceration muttered coldly. "It's becoming irritating."

The cannon hummed.

SNAP!

Silver strings whipped across the battlefield and wrapped around the cannon instantly.

Keyler planted both feet into the ground, veins bulging in his arms as he yanked backward with everything he had.

"You're not firing that thing," he growled.

The cannon trembled against the bindings.

Olsen wheezed from the dirt, blood pouring from his mouth as he looked toward Keyler.

Then he threw his hammer.

"CATCH IT!"

The weapon spun violently through the air—

—and transformed mid-flight.

Metal folded outward into a gigantic jagged axe pulsing with glowing veins of energy.

Keyler caught it one-handed.

A grin flashed across his face.

"Now THAT'S what I'm talking about—"

He swung.

The axe hurtled toward Incarceration like a missile.

But Incarceration caught it instantly.

Silence.

His glowing eyes lowered toward the weapon.

Then toward Olsen.

And for the first time since the fight began—

He looked tired.

Not physically.

Emotionally.

Like every act of violence was digging him deeper into something he couldn't crawl out of anymore.

Then he moved anyway.

SHKKK!!!

The axe spun in his grip—

—and he buried it directly into Olsen's chest.

CRAAAAACK!!!

Blood exploded from Olsen's mouth.

The battlefield froze.

Olsen collapsed backward with the axe lodged deep in his torso, twitching weakly as smoke curled around him.

Ella screamed his name.

Keyler's eyes widened in horror.

And Incarceration...

Just stared at Olsen breathing on the ground.

Like he hated that he did it.

But couldn't stop himself anymore.

Then his metal boot slowly pressed down onto Olsen's chest, grinding him deeper into the shattered earth.

Above them, war consumed the sky.

Celestianites fell from the heavens like burning stars, wings ripped apart as radiant blood scattered across the clouds.

Lunaranites tore through the air firing crescent-shaped blasts that split through smoke and ash.

Everywhere—

Heroes were down.

Broken.

Bleeding.

Failing.

Only Jaylen still remained standing.

Barely.

He knelt in the middle of the battlefield, blood dripping from his fingertips while his damaged wings twitched behind him.

Yet his eyes still burned with defiance.

Incarceration stared at him silently.

SHHHKKKK!!!

The cannon reformed into a massive crimson blade taller than Jaylen himself.

Its edge glowed like liquid hatred.

Around them, Ella, Demaurion, Keyler, and the others strug-

gled helplessly across the destroyed battlefield.

Incarceration slowly approached Jaylen.

The blade dragged behind him, screaming against the earth.

"You know," he said quietly, "you actually remind me of us."

Jaylen looked up weakly.

Incarceration's expression darkened.

"That's why you have to die before the world ruins you too."

He knelt in front of him.

"You were brave," he admitted softly.

A pause.

"Strong, too."

Olsen coughed violently from the dirt.

"N-No..."

Incarceration ignored him.

Then he slowly rose and lifted the sword overhead.

"I ANNOUNCE THIS PUNISHMENT—"

His voice thundered across the battlefield like a god's judgment.

"—WILL BE FATAL!"

Red lightning exploded across the clouds.

"And HE..."

His glowing eyes locked onto Jaylen.

"...will die for the good of this world."

Ella clawed across the dirt desperately.

"DON'T KILL HIM!"

Jaylen's battered wings trembled weakly.

Blood dripped from his chin.

But somehow—

He smiled.

"If I die..."

He coughed.

"...then at least it meant something."

The words hit the battlefield like a funeral bell.

Even Incarceration hesitated.

Just for a second.

Then his face hardened again.

"Goodbye, Jaylen the Celestianite."

Demaurion roared and clawed toward him through the rubble.

"DON'T YOU TOUCH HIM!!!"

Incarceration brought the sword down.

SHWIIIIING!!!

Time slowed.

Everyone froze.

The blade descended toward Jaylen's skull—

—and stopped.

The battlefield went silent.

A hand tightened around the blade.

Actually stopping it.

Celestial lightning exploded outward across the battlefield.

KRAAAAKKKKK!!!

Wind erupted in every direction.

Keyler slowly lifted his head from the dirt.

And standing over Jaylen—

Was Don.

Head lowered.

One hand gripping the massive crimson blade hard enough to crack it apart.

Violet horns glowed through the smoke.

His wings stretched outward like divine shadows against the burning sky.

His tail swayed slowly behind him.

And celestial energy crackled around his body in violent arcs

of purple lightning.

The battlefield itself reacted to his presence.

Fallen Celestianites shimmered faintly.

The air trembled.

Even the Fake Lunaranites stopped moving.

Incarceration stared at him.

Actually stared.

The Zenith finally looked afraid.

—

"I've been waiting for this, Incarceration," I whispered as I slowly looked up at him—eyes crackling with celestial energy. "For this one moment... where I get to fight back again."

Incarceration's eyes of nightmare fuel settled on my daggers as he scoffed. "And you really have what it takes to beat me?"

The wind bellowed as everybody stared at the two of us in the center.

Jaylen unhurriedly crawled back, letting me deal with the situation.

SSHIWNG!

My dagger carved across his chest.

Incarceration staggered backward, his boots scraping across the battlefield.

Breathing heavily, I lifted myself up, letting the cosmic light rest along my shoulders.

"Incarceration..."

The air held its breath. Gales whipped my hood behind me.

"...let's get this over with."

I bent one knee.

My cosmic eyes illuminated.

"50..."

Energy shimmered in my hand with excitement, but I powered it down.

"...percent."

Like a lamp, my body lit up in a neon cosmic aura. Contours of violet energy throbbed calmly around my frame.

There were no shockwaves or violent winds.

It was just a silent transformation.

Everybody around me gaped in wonder and relief, the violet glow dappling across their bodies as I gradually straightened.

I balled my fists, stepped toward Incarceration, and pointed a finger at the ground.

"High-End... transformation."

My light rippled.

Incarceration giggled, "Chosen One... where was the Scourge Don I knew...?"

"There's no Scourge Don anymore."

Cosmic energy dragged across the ground as I traced a line with my finger. I lifted it, and the celestial current swirled around it.

"The veil of evil that you forced me into... I left it for the greater good."

He spat blood onto the battlefield, his grin beginning to twitch.

"I see... you've changed."

The light around my finger condensed into a final sphere of violet energy.

"That's not the only thing about me that has changed..."

It calmly spun like a rotating planet.

"It's what I've learned about you."

I flicked the sphere toward him.

It burst into sprays of neon purple.

I warped.

He loaded his cannon as crimson energy brightened.

FWIPFWIPFWIPFWIPFWIPFWIP!

Violet darts blinked back and forth around him.

I skidded across the dirt.

I launched.

Dust exploded beneath my feet.

I spun, my leg whipping around.

He turned—

BASHK!

The impact blasted him across the sky as he tore through a mountain miles away.

I dropped into my stance.

Energy bent and glitched.

The wind pulled itself back.

BOOM!

The camera lost my frame, catching only a curved trail of cosmic light stretching across the land.

From below, my legs felt quick and unnatural.

The background blurred into smears as I inhaled and exhaled while sprinting.

A close-up of my eyes reflected the sky.

Energy twisted as I warped into the air, clouds jetting past me in milliseconds.

A red disk of light hurled toward my back, forcing me to blast my body aside.

A punch slammed into my back.

The impact echoed across the sky as my body became a tiny comet, smashing through a building.

I slid across the glossy floor, surrounded by shattered glass and twisted golden metal.

A crimson portal opened in front of me.

Black claws slammed against the glossy floor as Incarceration gradually rose from the portal before snapping it shut with a simple flick.

He landed.

The building rumbled.

I rose from the cracked floor as dust rushed through the massive hole behind him.

The bones in my back felt tighter than ever.

That punch really did something.

I anchored myself, letting the energy settle.

Incarceration's footsteps clicked across the shining floor.

"I've also learned a lot about you too, child."

He raised his chin as rays of crimson light beamed from his eyes.

"You were so useful..."

My fists trembled.

My eyes narrowed into a glare.

My stomach twisted.

My head had never felt heavier.

"To you..."

I was already at his flank, arms spread, one foot planted while the other trailed behind.

I shot my leg upward, smashing his jaw hard enough for blood to burst from his nose in slow motion.

I slammed my leg down, twisted into a punch, planted my foot, then launched forward, showering him with a flurry of cosmic strikes to his flank.

A split-second later—

His claw caught my fist.

He lifted me off the floor, spun, and hurled me across the

building with a grunt.

BISHK!

My body tore through exploding metal and glass, crashing through two buildings.

Midair above the city, I caught myself and shot into the sky.

I ascended over the building, front-flipped downward, and skimmed the rooftop while staying low.

I whispered,

"30%..."

A noise sounded behind me.

I whirled with a glimmer.

"BACKHAND OF FORCE!"

My arm smeared through the air and smashed across a beast's head, unleashing an explosive air blast.

My eyes widened as its head fell in slow motion.

"No way... he—"

His fist buried deep into my ribs.

RRRRRRRRIP!

He dragged me upward before slamming his fist into my jaw.

I staggered.

He rushed toward me, slashing with his sword.

I caught the blade with one of my dagger arms, quivering as I slowly looked up at him.

SWHING!

I yanked the sword away, flickered beside him, and slammed my fist into his face.

I twisted, put my daggers back, and launched toward him again—tackling him straight through the clouds.

We ripped through the air.

He looked down at me, grinning.

I looked back, glaring.

I spun and threw him across the clouds.

He slowly floated backward, crossing his arms as he stared at me.

"This is your final fight against me, kid... please—show me all you've got."

"Don't worry..." I said.

"I won't bore you."

A shockwave roared behind me as I blasted forward with both fists outstretched.

BOOOM!

Incarceration caught both of them.

The shockwave exploded outward, shaking the entire area.

He smirked, crimson flashing through his eyes as he tightened his grip around my fists.

"You're so much stronger, where's your base form?"

"That one gives me nostalgia."

He lifted me over his shoulders before hurling me toward the ground.

My body became a dart of light.

BOOOOM!

I slammed into the earth with extraordinary force, sending a violent blast of wind racing across the battlefield.

I looked up.

My eyes widened.

A crimson bolt crashed into me like lightning.

Impact frame.

The battlefield vanished into black and white as devastation erupted around me.

Feet buried themselves into my gut.

The dust settled.

His cannon began charging.

"Alright... time to end this."

He raised it and aimed straight at me.

FWISH!

I flashed away.

My feet hit the ground behind him.

I dashed forward in a streak of light, fist blurring as violet energy blazed around it.

He spun.

BOOM!

My fist collided with his face, unleashing a devastating shockwave that ripped across the entire region.

He launched over the battlefield.

I chased him.

A left hook.

A right hook.

Another.

Then another.

Each punch came faster than the last.

I screamed, roaring into the sky as we tore across the battlefield.

The world blurred around us while my fists became flickering streaks, hammering Incarceration's face in relentless barrages as we blitzed through the air.

His hand suddenly shot out.

He caught my arm.

Lifted it.

Smirked.

One crimson eye flashed.

His fist ignited.

BAMMMMMMMM!!!

It buried itself in my gut.

The shockwave exploded through my body, launching me into the sky.

I flipped helplessly before crashing through a mountain and slamming into the ground.

I rolled.

Bounced.

Crashing through mountain after mountain.

Incarceration flashed behind me.

He caught me by the head.

Slowly lifted me into the air.

He leaned close and whispered into my ear,

"It really is the end of an era... am I wrong?"

A malicious chuckle followed.

FWISH!

I blinked away, driving my feet against the side of a mountain. My energy finally surged, knowing this was the moment.

"Your time of bringing terror to Celestia," I shouted over the roaring wind, "IT'S OVER!!"

He chuckled darkly.

Then it grew louder.

And louder.

And louder.

He laughed like a madman.

In an instant, he aimed his cannon at me, grinning.

"That's... that's really cute. But for Incarceration... insanity never has a good ending."

Wind vacuumed into his cannon as the battlefield trembled.

His grin widened.

The vortex spun faster.

The shaking became violent.

"No wonder you left the Zeniths!" I yelled. "YOU NEVER

BELONGED!"

"AND SO—DID—YOU!"

Nightmarish energy flooded his cannon as the pull clawed through the air, roaring against my ears.

"WHAT MADE YOU THINK THAT YOU WERE A PART OF YOUR TEAM?!"

His eyes flickered between red and blue while the storm raged around him.

I noticed it.

He still cares.

A hurricane consumed the battlefield while a towering tornado spiraled around him.

I dug my feet deeper into the mountain.

"I FACED SOMETHING NORMAL!"

"I FACED SOMETHING THAT'S A PART OF LIFE!"

"HUMILIATION!"

"IT CAN'T BE ERASED, YEAH!"

"BUT IT HELPS YOU GROW AS A PERSON!"

"AND YET YOU TWISTED IT INTO SOMETHING ROTTEN JUST SO YOU COULD FEEL SUPERIOR!"

His eyes turned blue.

For five seconds...

His power softened.

Then he snapped back.

"NO!"

The blue shattered into a brighter crimson.

The storm became even more violent.

I crossed my arms.

My eyes narrowed as the outline of my body burned brighter.

"One hundred percent..."

Energy danced wildly around me.

BOOMTH!

I launched into the sky, detonating the mountain behind me.

Wind screamed past as I dissolved into celestial energy, diving straight toward Incarceration.

I became a rolling sphere of divine light.

"Violet..."

Electrical cosmic energy wrapped around my body.

Time stretched.

Every ounce of power coiled into my leg.

"VIOLENCE!!!"

The sky split apart.

Incarceration unleashed an enormous scarlet beam.

The blast rippled the air, shook the earth, and swallowed the storm.

Mid-roll—

I blinked straight toward him.

Time slowed.

His eyes widened.

My white-violet leg curved toward him.

"No..."

BRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAKOOO

I stood upright, celestial energy crackling around my High-End form.

Slowly, I looked down.

Incarceration lay motionless on the battlefield.

His head was rolling next to him.

Splattered blood stuck over the ground and beneath his neck.

The fight was over.

My expression never changed.

I whispered to myself,

"Happens to everyone..."

I turned away, snapped my fingers, and teleported back to the crew.

| #1.40 — Ultra Dark Don, ARISE |

I quickly sprinted towards Olsen, who was slumped against a rock, sitting with his back to it. He had an axe pierced straight into his chest, and his face was bloodied, breathing heavily—fighting for dear life.

"You alright, bro?" I said as I swiftly yanked the axe from his chest, tossing it to the ground. Olsen slowly pushed himself off the rock, beginning to limp a little, and just before collapsing, Lonnie Mae's vines caught him and shot through his chest from behind. The vines glowed a faint, soft green, and they gradually healed Olsen's wounds—the blood washing clean off his body.

After a few minutes of healing, Lonnie gently pulled the vines out, leaving Olsen to stand on both of his legs. He was alright.

He was finally breathing normally, and he could move freely again.

He groaned, "Yeah... I'm alright..." The sky was still in its war form.

Dark gray clouds and thick sheets of smoke draped over the earth, and the ground was pitch-black, with flames blazing and burning wildly across the area.

This was Celestia now. It was all... gone.

The ground was torn apart, scorched by fire, and once-tall buildings were crushed and collided together, now reduced to

a ruined wasteland. From afar, the city looked destroyed—like someone stomped on a pile of fragile Legos. Celestianites lay dead across the ground, blood everywhere. Millions of them scattered around the battlefield.

They fought well... but I guess the enemy was just too much. I shook my head, staring into the flames. "How are we gonna fix this now?" I turned around completely, facing everyone else. They walked towards me with tired grins on their faces.

"I see what you mean, Don... the place is—just like Scarletsville," Sophia said, her eyes scanning the ruined battlefield. Starla looked up at the sky and saw her brother, Prince Lock, flying toward her in full Celestianite Dragon form. His armor glittered and sparkled, splattered with blood—everywhere. His spear was crimson red, and so were his talons.

He landed slowly on all fours right in front of Starla, then gradually transformed into his base form, staring straight at her. The two of them narrowed their eyes at each other, then Lock shook his head in disappointment.

"Where were you the entire time?!" he yelled. "I had to fight millions—and I'm not kidding, MILLIONS—of Lunaranites! There was blood everywhere—EVERYWHERE! And YET YOU DIDN'T COME!" "Brother, it's not my fault!" Starla said as she steadily walked toward him, her eyes wilting. "Look, I'm sorry for leaving, but I can't just let Dreadixz collect all the Power Gems!"

"Where is Scorch? What happened to your guardian?!" Lock barked. "He's supposed to protect you—he's supposed to ALWAYS be with you!"

"Lock, I'm old enough to take care of myself! I don't need Scorch to protect me all the time! I fought in this war like everyone else, and ever since Dad was gone, the last thing he

told me was that sometimes people have to walk alone!" Starla snapped, gripping her brother's arm. Lock stood there, staring deeply into Starla's eyes. She stared back, her glare firm and serious. Then Lock sighed, pulled away, and turned around to walk off.

"Fine. Just remember... don't get yourself killed." I stood beside Starla, watching Prince Lock walk away. "Some sibling dynamic, huh?" Starla sighed, rolling her eyes.

"He's just like that all the time." William suddenly noticed something. His eyes darted around the field as if he were trying to spot something.

Then they widened as he turned back to the crew.

"Uh, guys... where are the Officials?" "The Officials?" My head perked up. I raised my eyebrow at William. "What do you mean? Did they fight with you guys or something?"

"Yes!" Kwa'asja nodded. "Guervens and Coltz—they were with us, right? The only Officials we have here are Jaylen and Lock! But where are the others?" Jaylen looked up into the sky, peering from afar, then squinted. "I think I already found our answer..."

Everybody turned their attention toward Jaylen. He was pointing at something way off in the distance. We all shared glances, then walked toward Jaylen to stand beside him. I stared across the valley of fallen Celestianites and raging flames—and then I saw something... HUGE. It was a massive castle—the Castle of Celestia.

It was still golden, still standing. It looked completely intact. It shimmered from afar, glistening despite the lack of light. The tower reached high above the clouds, nearly touching space. But something wild was happening... A streak of blue energy was flowing from the top of the castle and shooting straight into the

sky. I could see it through the smoke and dust—it was a bright, glowing line of Power Gem energy. I whispered under my breath, shaking my head in awe, "Dammit..."

Ella screeched, "It's Dark Don! The Power Gems must've gotten into the Celestial Pillars—and he's probably right there!"

"You're not wrong, Ella. incarceration literally told Dark Don to get to the celestial pillars before we even started fighting!" Mason cried, wiping blood from his nose.

I clenched my fists, and violet celestial energy—like flames—erupted from them. I gritted my teeth, staring into the sky, finally realizing what it meant. The rest of the Officials were probably over there—fighting Dark Don in the castle. And it looks like... Dark Don won. As we gazed up at the towering structure, a radiant lunar explosion bursts from the castle—and I saw Dark Don and Coltonz flew out of the castle, which appeared to be surging with streaks of white and green energy.

They both started clashing in mid-air, punching, kicking, and launching energy blasts that exploded all around them, shaking the very ground and tearing into the atmosphere like thunderclaps. Then suddenly, Dark Don delivered a brutal punch straight into Coltonz's gut, launching him straight down toward the earth like a missile.

The green streak fell through the sky, and then— **BWWWWOOOOOOOMMMMMM!!!**

A massive green shockwave roared across the battlefield, rattling both the ground and the air itself.

I held on tightly to the ground, gritting my teeth against the wind, my eyes squinting shut. Then, in a flash, I forced them open—and celestial energy erupted from my right eye like a flare. Once the chaos simmered down, I rose up, holding my arm and scanning the wreckage.

My tail whipped rapidly behind me as I spotted the white streak jetting back into the air—now clashing with a bright red one. The white streak suddenly spun at rapid speed, morphing into a tornado of blinding light, and hurled the red streak down into the ground, causing another massive eruption. This time, chunks of earth were launched sky-high—actual slabs of land exploding into the air.

Things briefly calmed again. I glanced back up at the glowing white streak. Behind me, I heard everyone murmuring, just as stunned as I was. Then the glowing white figure looked down at me—and my eyes widened. In a blink, before I could even react, he was right in front of me, gut-punching my stomach so hard I went flipping backward across the scorched ground, my back scraping it at full speed.

The impact unleashed an enormous white lunar shockwave that quaked the area all over again. I accidentally leapt sideways mid-roll, but then I crashed into a jagged boulder—shattering it into fragments that exploded outward.

"DON!" I heard everyone shouting from the distance. I forced myself up, clenching my fists and slipping into my fighting stance. Celestial energy crackled around me violently, pulsing like raging violet flames. My eyes darted across the battlefield for the figure.

And then—**BOOM**—he came soaring down toward me, his arm reeled back, ready to throw another devastating blow. I barely managed to launch myself out of the way.

His punch smashed into the ground instead, creating an explosive shockwave so intense it launched me into the air like a trampoline rebound. Chunks of earth and rock scattered into the sky, and I flipped mid-air before landing with dramatic flair, skidding across the ground. He landed hard in front of me, fists

slamming into the ground with force—yet I stood firm, bracing against the quake. Wind howled around him, his glowing white aura pulsing in flashes. Rocks flew around him in a spiral, the wind itself seemed to obey him—swirling, bending, amplifying. I finally peeled my eyes open—and I looked at the figure.

It was Dark Don. Except... it didn't even feel like him. I only guessed it was him because of the lunar energy—and because the others told me. He looked like a full-on lunar god now. A glowing, silver being made entirely of celestial light. An energy even brighter than my KX form. His pupils? They were replaced with glowing letters: "XK". Excuse me?! Is this dude trying to be an off-brand me right now?! XK?! Okay... now he's just being extra. His hair had six spikes—two large ones curling back from the top, two arching upward from the bottom, and two more sprouting out from both sides of his head. All of them glowed with a radiant silver hue. The lunar energy flared and cracked around him like lightning, his glowing white eyes locked onto me.

Then he snapped his fingers. The chaos around him stopped. Everything. And even though I couldn't see his mouth, I swear I saw the smirk.

"It's nice seeing you again, KX..."

"WHO GAVE YOU THE RIGHT TO COME BACK?! I THOUGHT YOU WERE PARALYZED!" I yelled, wings twitching, eyes wide in disbelief.

He laughed. A deep, dark, menacing laugh. Slowly, he levitated into the air, arms folded. Everyone around us froze, watching him rise.

Dark Don hovered mid-air like some kind of divine being, his eyes glowing like searchlights. He looked like a lunar deity ascending to the heavens. Then he just stopped, floating

effortlessly. His light was so bright... I could feel it.

I could tell—it was visible around the entire world. He was outshining all of Celestia. Arms and legs crossed.

Floating. Silent. Dominating.

He took a few glances at his body, shifting and flexing it slightly, then turned to me and muttered in a cold, deadpan voice, "Great..." He floated still in the air. "Now that I have the most powerful form in Avangard's entire existence... I will finally—annihilate you..."

I smirked, placing my hands on my hips, my tail flicking and dancing behind me with rhythm. "You sure about that? I've fought beasts, monsters, even King Dreadixz — took him out too. Don't forget Incarceration — his decapitated head's rotting just on the far side of you!"

Dark Don scoffed, motioning with one arm while the other stayed folded across his chest.

"Do you really think you still have the will, the nerve, and the strength to defeat me? Think again, Don... I already dropped two Officials, nearly killed your friend Jaylen. Remember what I told you back at Insane Middle School?" I rolled my eyes casually, tail still whipping back and forth like a banner in a storm.

"I didn't forget, Dark Don. You're a bounty hunter, a Scarrist, a version of me that thinks it's better in every way, shape, and form... But you wanna know something?" Dark Don narrowed his glowing eyes at me, hovering with that same menacing, soul-chilling demeanor.

"What?"

I clenched my fists tight, flooding them with raw celestial energy. I clenched again, and the entire area began to tremble violently. I stomped my foot with all my force, and it tore right through the solid ground like a jackhammer, shaking the earth

once more.

Celestial energy warped and swirled around me like a growing vortex, and I snapped my head upward, eyes blazing a radiant violet hue.

My tail whipped furiously, my wings twitched like they were preparing for liftoff. Celestial sparks danced along my body, crackling like electricity from my feet to my head. The earth below began to quake — no, erupt. A whole earthquake was tearing through the battlefield.

Everyone around struggled to stay upright, but the seismic rumble just kept getting worse. It quaked, trembled, quivered, and shook — over and over like a living beast. My eyes flared with the glowing letters KX. The energy spiraled around me like flames on overdrive.

My eyes were already bursting with celestial fire, and my hair was going wild. It started morphing — two massive spikes forming. One sprouting from the crown of my head, arching backward. The other from the back of my skull, pointing straight up like a blade.

Cracks erupted from the ground below me, and my eyes blazed brighter and brighter. Celestial power crackled harshly and wildly, winds screamed around me, and debris started floating in the air. Then — with a fierce shout — I roared: "RAAAAAHHHHHHHHH!!!" Celestial energy erupted from my body in a violent explosion.

A massive, dark violet beam launched from me like a cannon blast, rocketing toward the sky at lightning speed.

My neckerchief scarf flailed wildly in the storm, tail thrashing faster than ever. The light radiating from my body was blinding — a whole purple comet hurtling toward the heavens, ready to shatter them. Stones spun and whirled around me faster than

sound itself. Wind twisted into a full cyclone, the landscape shook beneath me.

Dark Don gave me a sinister, disapproving glare. The energy around me surged and flamed like wildfire, then suddenly — **woosh** — the beam faded into the wind. I was left, cloaked in pure violet celestial energy.

My eyes glowed brighter than ever, teeth clenched, fists ready to bash in some Lunaranite jawlines. One pupil had a glowing "K", the other an "X" — both burning with dark violet fire. Stars shimmered and rippled around me like cosmic waves. Then, I lifted off the ground, rising into the air. Everyone looked up in awe, silent.

I struck my fighting stance midair, squaring off against Dark Don. He mirrored me — copying the stance like a challenge.

I narrowed my eyes and whispered with a grin, "KX FORM: Enganged."

| #1.41 — “You tried…” |

The moment I hit Dark Don, the sky *broke open with sound*.

A shockwave detonated outward from the collision, ripping through the golden mountains like they were paper. Entire peaks bent for half a second—then snapped back wrong, like reality forgot its own posture.

“DAMN YOU’RE STRONG!” I shouted, sliding back through fractured stone.

Dark Don didn’t answer.

He came forward instead.

A single swing—too fast.

I twisted under it. The air screamed where his fist passed.

He kicked.

I dropped my shoulder and ducked clean, the strike blowing a canyon line through the ridge behind me.

“Not bad!” I yelled, snapping my arm up to deflect his next punch. Sparks exploded on contact—lunar energy and celestial force grinding against each other like two collapsing stars refusing to die.

Dark Don blurred.

His body *glitched*—black and white flickers tearing through his outline as he phased forward.

"Blink if you can hit me."

"Ha!" I stepped aside at the last instant, his strike missing my face by millimeters. "Bet."

I shot upward.

Booted him straight into the air.

"WOO! NICE!"

"DON'T GET COCKY!" he roared back, already turning mid-fall, lunar energy snapping like broken glass behind him.

He dropped like a meteor.

I angled through the sky, weaving between jagged floating rocks as the impact of his descent carved afterimages through the air.

I slammed through a mountain.

BOOM.

The entire peak collapsed inward, crater blooming like the earth had exhaled pain.

Before I could even recover—

He warped behind me.

BAM.

"OW!" I yelled, ricocheting through the sky and smashing into a ruined city below.

Buildings blurred past in streaks of shattered gold and concrete light.

"Too slow!" I shouted anyway, forcing myself upright mid-flight.

Dark Don darted left.

Right.

Then vanished.

Reappeared in front of me.

Our fists collided.

The air *cracked open.*

I twisted through the impact and got launched through twenty structures in a single line—each building exploding like dominoes made of glass and stone.

Rubble rained like metallic confetti.

He rose through it.

A falling star turning upward.

Uppercut aimed at my face—

"Not bad!" I grinned, launching into the sky and spinning sideways just in time.

We met midair again.

Then again.

Then again.

Every collision hit harder than the last, each one warping the sky around us into bending sheets of light.

He flashed above a golden peak.

I dove straight at him.

Left kick.

Right kick.

Hurricane spin.

"THINK AGAIN!" I shouted.

He vanished behind me.

A roar—too close.

He surged forward—

Missed.

"Ha! You'll have to do better than that!"

I zipped sideways.

Fired a violet beam straight up.

The sky split open.

Clouds peeled apart like torn fabric.

Dark Don snapped his fingers.

A planet-wide flash of lunar light detonated across the hori-

zon.

Mountains shredded in the distance.

"Argh!" I swerved as his right hook came in like a collapsing moon. I barely dodged—his energy tearing through a peak behind me, turning it into falling dust.

Both fists slammed into my face.

"Not fast enough!"

I laughed through the impact.

"TRY HARDER!"

I vaulted above him, drop-kicked down, spun mid-air, and slammed my palm forward—

BOOM.

Lunar light bent violently and warped us both backward into the city.

"COME ON!" I screamed, darting toward him again.

Fists reeling. Teeth clenched. Energy burning through my veins.

He responded instantly.

Lunar glass formed around him—layered, shifting, shimmering like a prison made of moonlight.

I hit it.

Once.

Twice.

From every angle.

"GET OUT OF THERE ALREADY!"

He didn't move.

Then—

His hand shot through the glass.

Grabbed my head.

"Damn it—!"

Black-and-white lunar energy exploded from his palm.

The world went silent for half a beat.

Then darkness tore through my vision.

He hurled me downward—

reappeared—

and slammed me forward again mid-fall.

I spiraled through a building.

BOOM.

Rubble exploded outward in a perfect ring.

"RAHHHHHHHHH!!!" I roared.

Celestial energy snapped alive again.

My eyes flared.

My body ignited.

I shot forward—meeting his next strike with a shockwave that folded the air between us.

He tried glitch-fists—white-black distortions tearing at space itself.

I dodged through them, slipping between fractured frames of motion, then surged forward.

A violet dome erupted around us.

He blinked behind me instantly.

"CELESTIANITE WEAKLING! YOUR TRIBE DESERVES PAIN!"

"How is the tribe feeling pain if I'm the one getting smashed?!" I yelled, ducking another blast and sliding through collapsing buildings.

I zipped forward.

Right in his face.

"BE FOR REAL, DARK DON!"

I twisted through his hooks, slipped a gut punch, vaulted over a collapsing ruin, and kept moving.

Everything behind us stopped being architecture.

It became *shrapnel weather.*

He launched forward.

Fists raining.

Beams erasing streets.

Mountains collapsing like they were tired of existing.

He grabbed my head again.

Slammed me into a mountain.

Dragged me across it.

The entire peak split open like a zipper of stone.

"NOT FAST ENOUGH!"

"Yeah?!" I kicked off him mid-drag and launched upward.

Sky cracked.

I twisted mid-air.

Power gathered.

A shot erupted from my core—peaks collapsing outward as white-black energy shot straight into the sky.

Rocks detonated upward like reversed gravity.

"RAHHHHH!" he screamed back.

I felt it now.

That shift.

I charged KX.

Hair lifting.

Eyes burning.

Veins glowing with celestial lightning.

I streaked sideways.

"You can't hide!"

He vanished.

Reappeared behind me.

Reality snapped.

Light fractured like broken glass.

I shot past falling mountains, energy coiling around my arms.

Then—

KX jump.

I tore through space between golden peaks, everything blurring into streaks of light and motion.

We collided midair again.

Fists locked.

Energy exploded outward—lunar versus celestial tearing the sky apart.

"Is that all you got?!" I yelled.

"Never!" he answered.

Twin star collision.

Mountains trembled.

Clouds shredded.

He fired a beam.

I clapped my hands—

"RACING STARS!"

A celestial beam dropped from above.

He canceled his attack instantly.

Lunar energy spiraled into his palm—

and swallowed mine.

"...What?"

He cracked his neck.

Grabbed my head again.

Gravity inverted.

"NO—!"

I was launched across mountains like a broken comet.

Everything became blur and impact.

I stopped midair.

Barely.

Energy coiled deep inside me.

I exploded forward—

BOOM.

Split the sky open.

"YEAH! FEEL THIS!" I screamed, KX flaring violently as lightning crawled through my body.

He just watched.

Arms crossed.

Smirk sharp.

Finally interested.

"Finally," he said quietly. "Let's see what you've got."

We moved at the same time.

The collision tore the mid-sky apart.

Mountains trembled like they were scared.

Clouds ripped open.

Fists blurred into nothing.

I twisted through his strikes, grabbed one arm, spun him midair, and slammed him into a mountain so hard the entire range shook.

He vanished again.

Reappeared.

Glitch-white fists.

"HA! TOO SLOW!"

He launched me upward like lightning itself had kicked me.

Pain detonated through my body—but I forced forward anyway.

"I CAN'T KEEP UP?!" I yelled, pushing through the pressure.

Kick.

His face snapped sideways.

He dropped like a missile.

The ground below him caved in.

I landed, flipped through collapsing terrain, and shot after him.

Mountains kept falling behind us like dominoes.

I appeared behind him again.

Energy coiling.

KX flickered.

Unstable.

"...Time... to end this?" I whispered.

A trembling celestial ring formed in my hands.

He vanished.

Uppercut.

I got launched through clouds.

Sky turned orange-white chaos.

His fists became micro-blurs—thousands of hits stacking into one continuous reality break.

I screamed.

The sound echoed across fractured mountains.

He twisted.

Lunar fire erupted.

Slammed into me.

The shockwave erased everything for a second—mountains, sky, distance—just white.

Snap.

Reality reassembled wrong.

He hit me again.

Side.

Then again.

Downward.

I crashed through the Room of Zeniths tower.

Concrete exploded outward.

Glass turned into rain.

I hit the ground.

Hard.

Silence.

KX flickered.

Dying.

Vision blurred.

Dark Don landed nearby.

Arms crossed.

That same smirk.

"Pathetic," he said.

I lay there.

Barely moving.

Base form again.

Energy sputtering like a dying star.

Everything around us—city, sky, mountains—kept shifting like reality couldn't decide what version of the fight was real.

| #1.42 — A Strike for Power |

I slowly scanned the battlefield, my head spinning from everything Dark Don had hit me with.

This wasn't the Castle of Celestia.

We were in the Room of Zeniths.

The tower beside us stretched high above the city, and everything around me seemed to sway in and out of focus. I couldn't tell if it was the tower moving or just my vision giving up.

I was exhausted.

Blood covered my suit. My body ached from head to toe. I'd been knocked completely out of KX form.

I lay on my back and stared up at the Celestial Pillars surrounding the room. The Power Gems were scattered across the floor between them.

Despite all the damage, the room still looked incredible. Golden light flowed through cracks in the walls and pillars, illuminating chunks of broken architecture that had collapsed during the battle.

"This... isn't the Castle of Celestia," I muttered.

I forced myself to take a breath.

"This is the Room of Zeniths..."

Dark Don stepped toward me.

White and silver lunar flames twisted around his body as he

looked down at me.

"I know," he said. "This tower is connected directly to the Castle of Celestia. It draws energy from the castle and channels it into the sky."

I tried to sit up.

I barely moved before his rocket boot slammed into my chest.

THUD.

The impact drove me back into the floor.

I coughed and winced as heat rolled off his armor.

"So what now?" I asked. "Was that the point of all those fake Lunaranites? The birds too? I can still hear them."

Dark Don chuckled.

"Why kill you..." he said.

He tilted his head.

"...when I can kill the world?"

For a moment, I thought I'd heard him wrong.

"What?"

He stepped away from me.

"I won't need this place anymore."

I stared at him.

"Destroy the world? Are you insane?"

Dark Don slowly turned around.

His expression never changed.

"I am insane."

Lunar energy exploded around him.

The room shook.

"First target... the moon. Next target..."

His fists clenched.

Lunar energy erupted around him in violent spirals, cracking the air itself. The entire room felt like it leaned closer to him.

"First target... the moon. Next target... Avanga—"

He never finished.

A blur shot through the air.

BOOM.

Jaylen crashed into Dark Don and launched both of them into the sky.

Their collision shook the tower as they tore through the air, trading blows so fast I could barely follow them. Every impact echoed through the room.

BOOM.

BOOM.

BOOM.

The battle moved above the broken ceiling.

A shattered window burst apart as Keyler dropped into the room. Spider threads shot from his hands and anchored themselves across the damaged walls and pillars.

A portal opened beside me.

The rest of the team rushed through.

Archie was the first to reach me. He slid to my side and pulled me upright.

Every muscle in my body protested.

I looked up.

The sky above the tower had become a war zone.

Coltz streaked through the air in flashes of green lightning. Guervens cut through the smoke. Prince Lock joined the fight moments later.

One by one, they threw themselves into the battle against Dark Don.

Olsen limped over to me.

He still looked rough from the earlier fights, but he managed a small smirk.

"You okay?"

I nodded weakly.

"Barely."

His gaze drifted toward the Power Gems resting between the Celestial Pillars.

For a moment, he just stared at them.

Something crossed his mind.

I could see it on his face.

Before I could ask what he was thinking, a sharp pain hit my chest.

I froze.

Then my legs gave out.

Prince caught me before I hit the floor.

"Yo! What happened?" he asked. "Did Dark Don really mess you up that bad?"

I nodded.

"Yeah."

My voice barely came out.

"He did worse than that."

My knees hit the floor.

A second later, I collapsed completely.

As I turned my head toward the Power Gems, something flashed through my mind.

Memories.

Fragments at first.

Then all at once.

The battles.

My friends.

The reason I started this journey.

Everything came rushing back.

For a moment, I felt whole again.

Then reality caught up.

My body was still wrecked.

I couldn't even stand.

A shadow stepped behind the group.

Power.

Blood covered his suit.

He walked over and knelt beside me.

The moment he saw the condition I was in, his expression dropped.

"Lonnie. Heal him."

Lonnie Mae rushed forward.

Vines wrapped gently around my neck as a green aura spread through them.

The pain eased slightly.

Not enough.

Just enough to keep me conscious.

Power rested his forehead against mine.

"Don," he said quietly. "Can you still use KX?"

I looked away.

"No."

The answer came out broken.

Kai hopped onto my head and immediately started licking my face.

Then my arms.

Then my chest.

The little guy was panicking.

He nudged me repeatedly, trying to get me back on my feet.

I couldn't do it.

I was done.

Angel stormed over.

Portals spun behind him.

"Don!" he shouted. "Look at what's happening out there!"

Ten portals opened behind him.

I looked through them.

The world was falling apart.

Alien birds filled the skies.

Fake Lunaranites covered entire regions.

Monsters tore through cities.

Scarletsville was under attack.

Iris Town was burning.

Musicia was gone.

The Land of Hearts was gone.

Mechamio was in chaos.

The Rufty Mountains looked even worse.

Earthnites hid inside caves while monsters destroyed everything above them.

I stared at the destruction.

Then I slammed both fists into the floor.

"What are we even fighting for?"

The room went quiet.

I punched the wall.

Stone cracked.

"No fucking point."

Nobody answered.

"We fought for this? We bled for this? Just so Dark Don could tear everything apart?"

I looked toward the Power Gems.

"What am I even supposed to do now?"

Kai flinched.

Starla picked him up and held him close.

I slowly pushed myself to my feet.

Celestial energy crackled across my skin.

I could still feel it.

But it felt heavier than ever.

"Don't tell me we came this far just to stand here and watch."

I shook my head.

"This isn't destiny."

I looked around the ruined room.

"This is nothing."

I stomped the ground.

The floor trembled.

Dust drifted from the ceiling.

"I'm done."

The words surprised even me.

Not because I meant to quit.

Because I genuinely didn't know what else to do.

"This feels impossible."

Power grabbed my shoulder.

"Don, wait."

I didn't answer.

"We can still beat him," he said. "We've done this before."

I turned toward him.

"When I say I'm done..."

I paused.

"...I'm done."

Power tightened his grip.

Then he smiled slightly.

"There's no E in Don."

My breath caught.

Then he looked me straight in the eye.

"Remember what you said in Scarletsville?"

The memory came back immediately.

"We're the Five Chosen Ones," I had said. "That means we do whatever it takes. If we die, we die. But we're not backing

down."

The memory faded.

I was back in the tower.

Back in the present.

"How are we supposed to win?" I asked quietly.

Power smiled.

"It isn't about winning."

I frowned.

"It's about saving people."

He gestured toward the portals.

"As long as everyone makes it out alive, we've done our job."

Then he started listing everything happening across Avangard.

Monsters.

Alien birds.

Fake Lunaranites.

More monsters.

William raised an eyebrow.

"Did you forget fake Lunaranites?"

Power laughed.

"Oh yeah. Fake Lunaranites too."

A few people chuckled.

For the first time in what felt like forever, the room felt a little lighter.

Then Power looked back at me.

"You're our last hope, Don."

The room fell silent again.

I looked down.

Kai had curled up against my leg.

Slowly, I reached for my daggers.

A small smile appeared on my face.

"You're right."

I stood up straighter.

"Let's save the world."

Olsen pointed toward the Power Gems.

"You know what to do."

I immediately pointed at myself.

"Wait. Me?"

Everyone nodded.

I looked at the Gems.

Then back at them.

"Isn't there at least a small chance this destroys my body?"

"Olsen's right," Prince said.

Archie grinned.

"You're gonna be the next Celestianite King someday. Might as well start acting like it."

"It's either that or we lose," Demaurion added.

One by one, everyone gave their support.

Even Sophia.

That one caught me off guard.

Then Angel bowed.

Power followed.

A second later, everyone else did too.

I stared at them.

For a moment, I didn't know what to say.

Maybe they really believed in me.

Maybe I had to believe in myself too.

I looked down at my hands.

Celestial energy crackled around my fingers.

I thought about every battle.

Every friend.

Everything we'd survived together.

Then I turned toward the center of the Celestial Pillars.

"Thanks."

I smiled.

"Let's get this show on the road."

I stepped forward.

My wings spread behind me.

Wind swept through the room.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath.

Then I remembered the instruction from the old textbook.

There was only one rule.

Scream.

So that's what I planned to do. I inhaled, light purple energy glowing from my eyes. The building started to rumble. Wind howled. The sky twisted. I felt it. My tail swayed violently, caught in the storm I was creating.

The atmosphere didn't just change—it *fractured.*

Space around me started to shiver like it couldn't hold its shape anymore. Reality itself groaned under pressure, bending inward toward my body like gravity had a new owner.

Celestial energy leaked out of me in violent pulses—violet flames snapping into existence across my skin, flickering, unstable, alive. Not aura anymore.

Something worse.

Something *aware.*

Every breath I took stacked light on top of light, pressure on top of pressure, until my lungs felt like they were filling with a collapsing star.

Then it snapped.

"RAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH—!!"

The scream didn't echo.

It *erased air.*

Sound ripped outward in a circular detonation, shredding wind and silence at the same time. My chest heaved as I dragged in another breath—

"AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!"

And the world answered like it had been waiting for permission.

A hurricane detonated outward from my core.

Everything in range got folded into spirals of destruction. The entire structure around me convulsed, golden pillars screaming as they tore free from the ground like weightless monuments pulled by an invisible god.

Stone shattered mid-air.

Ornamented ruins lifted, rotated, and dissolved into the storm like they had never been anchored to reality at all.

Even the sky started to break formation—clouds twisting inward in spirals that shouldn't exist in nature.

Then the Power Gems moved.

One.

Two.

All of them.

They lifted slowly at first, then violently, snapping into orbit around me like they recognized a central law. Their glow stopped being color and started becoming *command.*

And then they fired.

Beams of raw spectrum light drilled into my chest—blue, red, white, orange, pink, black, green, cyan, silver—each one hitting like a different version of the universe trying to overwrite me at the same time.

My scream turned into something else entirely.

Pressure.

A distortion event.

The battlefield froze.

Not paused.

Stunned.

Even the air stopped moving like it was afraid to breathe wrong.

Dark Don hung mid-motion in the distance, caught in the middle of a strike. His body locked up, muscles rigid as the storm around him stalled. Slowly, his head turned.

One eye locked onto me.

For the first time—

his expression shifted.

Not fear.

Recognition of escalation.

My eyes ignited.

Violet didn't describe it anymore. There was no "shade" left to compare it to. It was deeper—like starlight condensed into something dense enough to bend meaning.

The glow didn't surround me.

It *replaced me.*

Light across Celestia began to dim as if everything else had agreed to step back.

Clouds spiraled inward.

The horizon curved.

Even distant enemies froze, their silhouettes trembling like their instincts were screaming something they didn't have words for.

Then I moved.

Foot slammed down.

BOOM.

The ground didn't shake.

It *panicked.*

Shockwaves erupted in perfect expanding rings, carving destruction outward in geometry too precise to feel natural. Everything within range got launched—Lunaranites, debris, broken stone, fallen remnants of war—spinning into the air like the planet was shaking itself clean.

Then my voice came out again.

Not loud.

Final.

"ULTRA—!"

The world cracked in response.

Stone split along invisible fault lines. The sky flickered like a broken screen trying to stabilize.

My arms shot upward.

"KX!!!!"

BOOOOOOOOM.

A pillar of violet energy detonated upward, ripping straight through the heavens like the sky had been stitched together just to be torn apart. Clouds didn't move—they *disintegrated.*

A scream of light followed.

CRRRRRRRAAAACK—!!!

The atmosphere tore open.

Five massive shockwaves followed the beam upward—impacting the world in delayed rhythm like consequences refusing to arrive all at once.

Forests vanished mid-branch.

Mountains didn't collapse—they folded inward like they were acknowledging defeat.

Anything still standing got erased into fading outlines against the light.

Then my body rose.

Not lifted.

Ascended.

Violet celestial fire wrapped around me in layers, hardening into armor that looked less like protection and more like a verdict made physical. Smooth, radiant, impossibly precise.

My hair snapped upward—then exploded into five razor spikes: two flaring outward like blades, one stabbing back, one rising like a neck-spine crown, and one towering like a horn made for war.

My eyes burned with KX sigils.

Not glowing.

Etched into existence.

Symbols crawled across my body, moving under my skin like living script rewriting what I was allowed to be.

I wasn't a person anymore.

I was a singular event pretending to have form.

A walking collapse point.

I raised my hand.

And tore the sky open.

A golden rift split reality apart.

Light poured down like molten judgment.

Celestia reacted instantly.

Not slowly.

Not gently.

Violently.

The land *came back.*

Dead zones sparked with life. Craters filled with golden energy. Broken terrain stitched itself into motion again like the world refused to stay defeated.

The Enchanted Kingdom reignited.

Celestial towers surged upward, breaking through clouds like they had been waiting underground for permission to exist again.

Rivers turned into flowing gold. Grass lit up with living energy, each blade vibrating like it remembered purpose.

I snapped my fingers.

Armor answered.

Every Celestianite across the battlefield was instantly wrapped in golden celestial plating—formed from their own energy, shaped by something higher than design. Light locked into place across their bodies like destiny given structure.

And I didn't stop.

A second pulse hit.

Armor evolved.

Gold sharpened into platinum-white brilliance. Plates reconfigured mid-air. Edges refined into lethal precision. Celestial circuitry ignited across every surface—blue-white constellations crawling over their bodies like the sky had been weaponized.

Star-gems embedded themselves into armor frames, syncing in perfect rhythm.

The entire army hummed.

Alive.

Connected.

Powered.

I turned slowly.

Toward the Lunaranites.

Still there.

Still watching.

Broken, cracked, scattered across the battlefield like they had refused to fall properly. Their shadows stretched long under the new light. No panic. No retreat.

Just silence.

And refusal.

I lifted my hand again.

The air *rang.*

And every Celestianite armor system responded at once—upgrading, unfolding, refining in a synchronized cascade of divine engineering. Platinum brightened into near-white brilliance. Energy lines sharpened into living circuits. The entire battlefield felt like it had been plugged into something bigger than war.

Something final.

They straightened.

Spines locked.

Chins lifted.

Breaths steadied.

They weren't just soldiers anymore.

They were inevitable.

I lifted off the ground, hovering higher, light pouring off me in violent waves. The sky bent around my ascent as I blazed there—silent, radiant—like the final boss of heaven itself had just entered phase two.

Then I looked at him.

Dark Don.

He didn't move.

Didn't speak.

Just stared.

And then—slowly—a grin split across his face.

"...You really did it," he muttered.

Silver sparks crawled over his fingers, snapping, hissing, gathering like the moon charging its verdict. He rolled his shoulders once, then cracked his knuckles—CRACK. CRACK.

The air tensed.

And then—

He exploded.

"ULTRA LUNAR ASCENSION!!!"

The sky went white.

Not bright—obliterating. Color vanished. Contrast died. A colossal sphere of silver-white energy detonated outward, perfectly round, perfectly violent. The shockwave erased sound. Clouds twisted into a screaming spiral above him, corkscrewing into a vortex of moonlight.

Gravity broke.

The ground fractured into floating slabs, stone lifting like it forgot how weight worked. Time itself stuttered—a hiccup in causality—frames skipping, reality buffering.

Dark Don hovered at the center.

Untouchable.

Silver lightning slithered around him like living serpents, snapping and coiling through the air. His wings reformed, stretching and crystallizing into jagged prisms of lunar crystal, edges refracting light into blinding shards. His hair sharpened into spiked silver flames, blasting upward in a wild halo of chaos.

His eyes—

Gone.

In their place: eclipsed orbs. White voids ringed with swirling silver—like black holes running backward, pulling light *out* instead of in.

A lunar crest carved itself across his chest, burning into existence, pulsing like a second heart synced to the moon's heartbeat.

Then the Lunaranites rose.

One by one.

They lifted from the battlefield as if summoned by gravity's opposite. Their armor reconfigured mid-air—reflective silver

plating sliding into place, veins of glowing white energy threading through it like veins of moonlight. They shimmered, half-real, half-echo—ghostly paladins of the moon.

Weapons formed in their hands.

Curved lunar swords.

Spiral spears humming with orbiting energy.

Mirror-shields that reflected *infinity*.

Dark Don raised a hand.

Time paused.

Just a fraction of a second—but enough to feel eternity press against my skin.

"Lunaranites..."

His voice rang out, layered, looping—like a cathedral bell echoing through a broken timeline.

"Stand. Fight. Erase."

Time snapped back.

They roared.

The battlefield ignited in silver fire, lunar energy clashing violently with celestial light. The sky screamed again.

I looked at him.

This divine glitch.

This corrupted reflection.

This warped mirror of what I could've been.

And I grinned.

"Celestia's alive," I said. "You're done."

He smirked back, rising higher, moonlight blazing off his form.

"Then show me," he said softly,

"what a king can really do."

"CHARGE!!"

My roar cracked across Celestia like celestial thunder detonat-

ing inside the sky itself.

The battlefield *moved instantly.*

Celestianites surged forward in a blinding wave—golden-white armor igniting like living suns, wings slicing through the air at hypersonic speed. Opposite them, Lunaranites erupted in savage formation, spears, muskets, claws raised—feral, coordinated, brutal. Two armies colliding at full velocity.

No hesitation. No spacing. Just impact.

I vanished.

Light-speed burst.

A streak of violet-white tore through the battlefield—

BOOM.

My fist slammed into Dark Don's jaw with enough force to distort the air into a glowing ring of fractured light. He slid half a step—then snapped back instantly, swinging a counterpunch that ripped a trench through the sky.

I blinked out.

Reappeared above him.

He followed.

We collided mid-air—

BOOOOM.

Reality *stuttered.*

Time flickered like corrupted footage.

We reappeared again—face-to-face—fists already moving.

Silver and violet detonated on contact, a shockwave so dense it folded the clouds inward like paper.

Eyes locked.

Killing intent sharpened into silence.

Then—

He spun.

A lunar kick turned into a tornado of force and launched me

downward like a meteor.

I corrected mid-fall.

Flipped.

Boosted.

LIGHT BURST.

"123 COMBO!!"

Right hook—impact.

Left hook—snap.

Knee—crack.

Elbow—backbreaker strike.

Dark Don's body spiraled through the air like a broken marionette for half a second—

I smirked.

"Let's go."

I surged again.

He vanished into blur-speed.

My strike hit air.

His fist hit my ribs.

I twisted mid-air—barely—spun and fired a Celestial Orb straight into his face.

He caught it.

Backhanded it like it was nothing.

BOOM—

I shot sideways through the sky, stabilizing instantly, flipping back into position.

Then I tackled him.

Full-speed impact.

We tore through clouds.

BOOM—BOOM—BOOM.

Meteor impacts stacked across the sky as we punched each other through a golden tower. The structure didn't fall—it *split*

vertically, like reality itself got sliced open.

We burst out the other side.

Falling.

Rising.

Fighting.

Dark Don slammed me into the ground—

CRATER.

I rolled out instantly, launched upward, and ignited.

"STRENGTH!!"

My aura detonated outward—muscles of light forming over my arms, every fiber glowing like a divine engine hitting maximum output.

I rocketed forward.

Each punch now carried Power Gem amplification.

BOOM—BOOM—BOOM.

His guard cracked.

Then shattered.

He launched into the sky like a burning comet.

I chased.

Sky split behind us.

Lunar beams fired wildly—white-black streaks tearing the atmosphere.

I weaved through them at blink-speed.

He froze motion for a fraction—

absorbed my Celestial Orb—

and snapped it back as a spiraling lunar beam.

I twisted out of it.

Countered instantly.

"CELESTIAL BARRAGE!!"

Purple comet-blasts flooded the sky.

He absorbed.

Returned fire.

FIFTY LUNAR ARROWS dropped like falling stars.

"Infinite Piercing."

The air turned into a warzone of streaking light.

I flipped through them at insane speed.

Grabbed one mid-flight.

Spun.

IMPAL—BOOM.

I drove it into his chest.

Explosion bloomed outward like a collapsing star.

He backflipped through it—

crashing through both armies mid-air, Celestianite and Lunaranite formations scattering like broken constellations.

Everything below us was gone.

Just ruin, smoke, falling towers.

He stopped mid-spin.

Eyes ignited.

"RAHHHHH!!"

He surged forward again.

I matched him instantly.

"SPEED!!"

We became two comets.

One violet-gold.

One white-lunar.

The collision hit at full velocity.

BOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMM!!

The shockwave didn't just break air—

it *split dimensions.*

The sky cracked like glass.

And suddenly—

we weren't in Celestia anymore.

We were falling through cosmic space.

Purple nebulae.

White void currents.

Electric-blue fractures in reality.

Stars bending around us like spectators to a war they couldn't interrupt.

Dark Don paused mid-motion.

"...What—"

I hit him in the jaw.

He kicked me through a collapsing starfield.

We vanished.

Reappeared.

Vanished again.

Each hit rewrote distance.

Each impact rewrote physics.

I caught him mid-spin.

"ULTIMATE STRIKE!!"

Fist into gut—

SPACE BENT.

Blood splattered in Ultra form.

I drove him downward through dimensional layers like falling through stacked universes.

Spin kick.

Jaw break impact.

Then—

I surged upward.

Momentum maxed.

Energy fused.

Power Gems ignited inside my fists like reactors syncing.

"VIOLET VIOLENCE!!"

BOOOOOOOOM!!!

A finishing dropkick shattered a dimensional plane beneath us.

We launched back into Celestia—

except Celestia was already breaking from our absence.

Dark Don recovered mid-air.

Opened a WHITE HOLE.

It screamed.

Space started collapsing toward it.

I clenched my fists.

Celestial energy overloaded.

We collided again—

and everything *vanished.*

No sky.

No ground.

Just—

THE CITY OF HEAVEN.

Golden-white architecture stretching beyond comprehension. Marble pillars floating in divine symmetry. Light that felt like judgment.

And at its center—

a throne.

Not a metaphor.

A presence.

Before either of us could process it—

Dark Don moved.

I moved.

We clashed inside Heaven itself.

BOOM—BOOM—BOOM.

Pillars shattered in silence.

Cloud-marble cracked open like glass.

Shockwaves didn't echo—they *sanctified the air as they de-*

stroyed it.

SNAP.

Back to Celestia.

Mid-air.

Breathing hard.

Fists raised.

Silence so heavy it screamed.

Dark Don hovered opposite me.

Unscathed.

Annoyed.

Alive.

I shot forward again.

"NOT DONE!!"

Left.

Right.

Uppercut.

Kick.

Explosive speed chain.

"CELESTIAL FORCE BREAKER!!"

I launched him like a meteor into a distant golden monolith.

BOOOOOOMMMM!!

The mountain detonated outward in a divine eruption of dust and light.

He rose from the crater.

Slow.

Smiling.

"You still think you can save Avangard?"

His voice was poison wrapped in calm.

"This world deserves erasure."

I steadied my breath.

"And you think destroying everything fixes anything?" I

growled. "My home. My friends. That's not something you erase."

He scoffed.

"Friends? Family? Weakness."

A step forward.

"Avangard needs a reset."

"You don't need a reset," I shot back. "You need a therapist."

That got a laugh.

Low.

Cold.

"Too late for therapy."

He vanished.

Behind me.

"LUNAR DEATH LAUNCH."

WHAM.

A single kick.

And I was gone.

Sky broke.

Atmosphere tore.

Orbit shattered.

Impact—

THE MOON.

A trench carved across its surface as I slammed in.

Silence.

Then pain.

Then movement.

I pushed myself up.

Blood floating in low gravity.

And above me—

Dark Don descended.

White-violet aura burning like a collapsing god.

Earth hanging behind him.
Moon shaking beneath us.
He tilted his head.
"Round two?"
I wiped my mouth.
"No—final round."

| #1.43 — Neon Shutters |

The Celestianites raised their spears high, armor flashing under the divine light slicing through the swirling clouds. Thunder cracked. Lightning tore jagged scars across the sky, reflecting off golden towers that groaned under cracks like veins. Below, the streets were soaked in blood. Fallen Lunaranites lay twisted and lifeless, wings shredded, bodies steaming from the searing energy of their own demise. Their souls had already fled.

Blue light split the clouds above—Celestial Pillars awakening, divine energy slicing downward like warning spears. Then the storm hit again. Fake Lunaranites and nightmare beasts dove from the sky, shrieking like falling meteors. Jaylen's fists clenched, knuckles whitening, wings battered and dripping. He glanced at Duke, whose silhouette towered over the battered crew, green-black energy coiling around him like living lightning.

"I'm sorry," Jaylen whispered. Duke gave a firm nod. "Go. Survive." With a war cry, Jaylen shot forward, leaving violet streaks in his wake. The crew followed—flipping, dodging, punching through waves of mechanical alien birds whose cannons spat molten bolts. Dirt, debris, and broken stone exploded like confetti under each impact.

Duke pivoted, eyes narrowing at Overbrawl and Krane. Krane cracked his knuckles; violet spiritual energy raced across his arms in arcs like lightning frozen in flesh. Overbrawl casually dropped Olsen and his axe to the ground, his crimson flames licking the edges of the streets. Olsen bolted after the crew, axe in hand, voice ringing: "DON'T SELL!"

"You realize you're weaker without that fancy watch, right?" Overbrawl said casually. Krane grinned. "Even without it, I'm still nearly king-tier." Duke stretched, cracking his fists, "So... we really throwing hands?"

His grin sharpened. Dark. Confident. Dangerous.

"Worst idea you've ever had."

"Maybe," Duke replied, eyes igniting neon-green, "but it's about to be your worst day."

He pointed.

The air *cracked.*

Like reality itself flinched.

Overbrawl's fists lit up first—crimson flames roaring up his arms like a furnace waking up. Krane followed instantly—fire and spiritual energy spiraling around him, violet lightning crawling up his veins like the world had plugged him into something violent.

Overbrawl exhaled.

"I don't wanna hurt you, kid... but if you're asking for a beatdown, Grandpa's gonna deliver old-school."

Duke's aura surged.

Green-black neon detonated outward.

"I'M MESSING WITH THE WRONG ONE!"

The sky trembled.

BOOM.

Duke vanished forward.

A neon missile tearing through space.

His fist connected with Krane's chest mid-motion—impact detonating into a shockwave that ripped through streets, launched clouds apart, and cracked the skyline behind them like glass under pressure.

Krane shot backward—skipping through air, smashing through towers, carving a glowing trail through the city.

Before Duke could reset—

WHAM.

Overbrawl hit him mid-air.

A full-body slam.

They both crashed through golden skyscrapers—steel and glass folding like paper as the structures split open in clean vertical screams.

Debris rained like burning confetti.

Duke flipped through the destruction, jets flaring, rockets screaming as he corrected mid-air.

He re-entered like a predator.

Tackle.

Impact.

BOOM.

Both hit the streets.

Fists collided instantly—no pause, no breath—just impact stacked on impact, neon sparks exploding with every contact like the air was short-circuiting.

Duke twisted—

dragged Overbrawl in a spiral—

and slammed him through a skyscraper that split perfectly in half, the building collapsing outward like a dying giant.

Duke landed clean.

Skidding.

Leaving neon scorch lines across the street.

Krane reappeared in his path—flames roaring.

Fire punch.

Duke blocked.

Rotated.

CRACK—

A backhand sent Krane flying through burning rubble like a broken projectile.

Duke didn't slow down.

He *chased.*

Rocketing through mountains, spires, broken towers—turning the entire battlefield into a scrolling ruin of destruction.

The city groaned under them.

A low rumble built.

BOOM.

An orange explosion launched upward from the rubble like a sun trying to escape.

Duke didn't even flinch.

He stood in the blast.

Unscathed.

Neon glowing through fire like it didn't care about heat.

Then he moved again.

Tornado spin.

A spiral of neon force erupted around him.

He shot forward and tackled Overbrawl out of the sky—

SLAM.

Ground impact detonated like a meteor strike, dust and debris spiraling outward in violent rings.

The battlefield blurred.

Roundhouse kick met counterstrike—

BOOM.

Neon green and dark orange shockwaves tore streets apart in opposite directions, splitting terrain into fractured geometry.

Duke surged into a barrage.

Fast.

Faster.

Afterimages stacking into a wall of motion.

Finish—

UPPERCUT.

Krane launched skyward.

But Overbrawl intercepted mid-air—driving into him with a chest collision that *fractured the atmosphere itself.*

Krane vanished—

reappeared behind Duke—

strike to the skull.

Duke spun through it.

Neon cyclones formed around his body like orbiting storms.

SLAM.

A neon orb condensed in his palm.

It pulsed once.

Twice.

Then detonated.

"NEON ABSENCE!"

Lightning tendrils erupted outward, binding Krane mid-air, yanking him across space like gravity lost its contract.

Krane smashed into Overbrawl—

Duke followed instantly.

"BLITZING SMASH!!"

FLASH—

The void cracked.

Clouds collapsed inward.

The air itself *folded.*

KRAKOOM!!

Both opponents were launched downward like broken meteors, slamming into the earth and erasing everything beneath them in a collapsing crater of dust and neon light.

Silence hit instantly.

Even the storm hesitated.

Smoke drifted.

Dust hung mid-air like the world forgot how to move.

Duke stood at the center.

Battered.

Breathing heavy.

Still upright.

Neon flickering across his armor like a dying circuit refusing to shut off.

His gaze shifted.

Across the battlefield.

The Pre-Heroes were running.

Olsen. Prince. Demaurion. Archie. Ella. Eli.

All of them streaking toward the Room of Zeniths, light trails cutting through the ruined city like hope refusing to die quietly.

Duke watched them go.

A small smirk cut through the blood on his face.

"...Go get 'em..."

His voice dropped lower.

Almost nothing.

"...kids."

On the Moon

The silence of space wrapped around us like a noose. Me and Dark Don faced off, energy roaring between us, our auras flaring so bright the stars looked scared to blink. Lunar dust swirled at our feet. Earth hung in the distance like a blue witness who did **not** want smoke with either of us.

Dark Don's eyes locked onto mine, glowing, hollow, sharp enough to slice through a meteor. His aura didn't flare; it thrummed, steady, controlled, like a wildfire that knew exactly where it wanted to burn.

The dude looked like a walking eclipse. A cosmic disaster with abs.

I raised my stance. He lowered his.

Then he... turned away from me.

Like I wasn't even worth the warmup.

My tail twitched. "Uh, hello? We're literally mid-boss fight—"

BOOM.

He stomped the moon like it insulted his mother. The ground spider-webbed under him, dust exploding upward in silver waves. He didn't even flinch. He just stared at his own hand, fingers curling like he was crushing a memory that wouldn't die.

"Dark Don," I warned, "are you—"

"I wasn't from Earth."

His voice dropped low. Steady. Controlled. The kind of voice dangerous people use when they're two seconds away from breaking the world in half.

Instantly, my guard froze.

He didn't turn fully toward me, only enough that I could see

one eye, glowing against the void like a dying star.

"I lived on Planet Night," he said. "Storms and shadows, no sun—dragons. Like me. Except..." His jaw clenched. "I have silver scales."

His aura flickered.

"I was eight. A scientist. Smarter than every adult on that planet." He said it like a fact, not a brag. "I built things that could save worlds. They called them biohazards. Called me a criminal. Hunted me."

He breathed in, sharp, annoyed, like remembering was a chore he wanted to punch.

"Silicia was my assistant."

A pause.

"A genius. Stronger than me in all the ways that matter. We planned to leave Planet Night. Together." Air around him *tightened*, like even space was listening.

"We escaped. Got shot down. Crash-landed in Avangard. Iris Town." His lip curled, not sad, but bitter, like the memory tasted like blood. "Scientists found us. Angel was one of them."

BOOOOM.

Another stomp.

Another crater forming under him. "I enrolled in Foreshade Academy. Wanted to command under Dreadixz. Wanted to be someone people respected instead of hunted." His voice dropped colder. "But they laughed. Called us aliens. Mocked Silicia." His fists tightened, lunar sparks crawling up his arms like silver lightning veins.

"I didn't talk. I fought. Hard. Anyone who crossed us paid."

His head lifted slightly. "Silicia was the only one who could calm me. Told me violence wasn't everything."

A scoff. "She was wrong. But I still tried... for her."

I felt something twist in my stomach. He still hadn't fully faced me. Like turning around was too vulnerable.

"When we turned eleven, the Celestianite Scouts found us. Thought we were Lunaranites." His teeth gritted. "We ran. She carried me. I transformed small to trick them."

He inhaled, sharp. Controlled. Like a blade being sheathed with shaking hands.

"She hid me under leaves... and I watched them stab her through the throat."

Finally, finally, he turned to face me fully. His aura surged, towering, cold, godlike. "The first word I ever spoke," he said, voice low as the void,

"was her name."

His Ultra Form ignited, silver power ripping out of him like a storm unleashed.

"You want to know why I hate Celestianites, Don?" he growled, stepping closer. "It's because of YOUR tribe. YOUR people. YOUR legacy."

He was accusing me with the precision of a man who'd been sharpening that hatred for years.

"I've slaughtered planets because of what they did. Because of what YOU represent."

His body trembled.

"The Lunaranites weren't the villains," he said, eyes burning white. "They were the only ones who took me in."

His breath hitched, barely.

Almost unnoticeable, but enough.

"She loved me," he said. "And I loved her too."

My heartbeat went insane and my stance faltered. My hands also shook because this was an alternate version of me too.

"Dark Don... we can fix this," I whispered.

His laugh was low and dangerous, like a blade slicing across ice.

"Never."

A massive Lunar sword manifested in his hand, silver lightning crawling across the blade like living rage.

"You'll never understand," he growled, stepping forward, aura surging like a tidal wave. "Your people killed the only thing I cared about."

He raised his chin, eyes cold and furious and heartbreakingly real.

"So now I'm gonna destroy the thing THEY care about most."

| #1.44 — Fury on the Moon |

We were suspended above the moon like gravity had given up pretending. The surface below wasn't still—it was fractured, alive with trembling fault lines and glowing scars from earlier clashes. Every movement we made sent delayed ripples through the lunar crust, like the world was reacting too slowly to keep up with us.

Ultraviolet fire poured off my body in unstable waves, folding and unfolding like a storm trying to become a star. Across from me, Dark Don burned in ultrawhite lunar radiance—clean, oppressive, almost surgical in how it erased the darkness around him. The space between us warped, stretched, and tightened again like reality couldn't decide if it should exist.

Neither of us moved for a second.

Just staring.

Pressure building.

Then I spoke, forcing my voice through the weight crushing the void between us.

"Dark Don... I'm not here to kill you. Why are you fighting me like I'm the enemy?"

Something flickered across his face—so fast it almost didn't exist.

Then it broke.

His aura detonated outward.

The moon surface below us spiderwebbed instantly, chunks lifting into orbit before falling again like the planet forgot how to hold itself together.

"I'M PUSHING IT AWAY FOR A REASON!" he roared, and the sound didn't just travel—it *overwrote space*, shaking starlight loose from the sky.

"Silicia is gone! Gone!" His voice cracked through rage. "Prophecy, war, destiny—I don't care about any of it!"

His energy surged into a vertical pillar of ultrawhite flame, punching through the void above us like it wanted to burn a hole in existence itself.

"I ONLY CARE ABOUT ERASING THE CELESTIANITES!" he screamed. "THEY MADE ME LIKE THIS!"

The force of it hit harder than any attack he'd thrown so far. Not physical—worse. Personal. Heavy enough to slow my breathing for half a second.

I steadied myself anyway.

"You didn't get shaped," I said quietly. "You got hollowed out. That's not the same thing."

His head snapped toward me.

The moon *cracked again*, deeper this time.

"YOU DON'T LIVE IN MY PAIN!"

He moved. The ground didn't respond—it just shattered after him.

"I wasn't born under your skies!" he shouted, voice tearing between fury and exhaustion. "I survived extinction, got rebuilt into a weapon, then thrown into a world that never stopped trying to kill me!"

Step by step, his presence got heavier, like pressure turning into mass.

"I built systems that outlast death. I kept collapsing worlds running when nothing else could!"

Silver lightning crawled up his arms now, threading into his aura.

"I met her after the crash," he said, voice tightening. "After all of it. And she still—she still laughed like tomorrow wasn't a lie."

A pause.

Smaller. Sharper.

"She stayed."

Then it snapped again.

"And your people took that away."

His aura surged violently, twisting into a spiraling crown of ultrawhite light.

"I burned Moonforge down!" he roared. "I freed them all!"

The moon trembled like it was trying to pull away from him.

"And it still wasn't enough!"

Silence hit like a vacuum.

Then his voice dropped.

"They put a gun to her head," he said, almost calm now—worse than the shouting. "Told me to choose."

A laugh broke out of him, but it wasn't humor. It was fracture.

"So I dropped the weapon."

His gaze locked onto mine, burning straight through me.

"She said my name," he continued. "She said something else too."

His aura destabilized, flickering like it couldn't hold shape anymore.

"I DON'T REMEMBER IT."

That was the real explosion.

A shockwave ripped outward, pushing me back through empty

space.

"That's what you don't understand!" he shouted. "Not that she died—"

A blade began forming in his hand. Not summoned. *Built.* Layered ultrawhite energy compressing itself into something sharp enough to divide meaning.

"—that her last words are gone from me!"

I felt my chest tighten.

His grip trembled.

Not weakness. Control barely holding rage in place.

"I didn't forget because I wanted to!" he roared. "I forgot because everything after her erased everything before her!"

The blade fully formed.

The moonlight bent around it.

"I don't get to fix that."

He lifted it.

And for a fraction of a second, he hesitated.

Then he launched.

The moon split under the acceleration.

But I was already gone.

My first strike landed clean across his guard.

The impact didn't just hit—it *rang*, sending him skidding across the lunar surface in a carving trail of shattered stone.

He recovered mid-motion, twisted, grabbed my arm—

—and threw me like momentum didn't apply to me.

Ultrawhite projectiles erupted from his hand instantly, tearing through space with high-pitched distortions that bent light around them.

I raised a barrier.

They struck in rapid succession, each impact blooming like tiny collapsing stars against the surface.

"You're starting with projectiles? Really?" I snapped.

I vanished forward.

Spun kick.

Impact.

He didn't stagger.

He appeared above me in the same breath, as if the space between actions didn't exist for him.

His fist dropped.

The sky cracked.

The moon surface imploded beneath the strike, sending me straight through a collapsing ridge of stone and dust.

I caught myself mid-flight, surged back up through the debris field—

Only for him to already be there again.

Close range.

Too close.

His punches came in a controlled storm—chest, jaw, ribs—each one compressing air into violent bursts.

I blocked what I could. Took what I couldn't.

The final hit launched me across the surface again, carving a trench through lunar rock.

I spun mid-slide, fired a burst of ultraviolet energy upward—

He split through it instantly.

We crossed paths in opposite directions like twin comets refusing to slow down.

I snapped my fingers.

Space *folded*.

A rift opened behind him.

He stumbled through it—

—and I detonated it with a pulse of ultraviolet force.

He was forced out into open space again.

I followed immediately.

We collided again mid-air.

Impact first.

Then sound.

Then everything else.

A second hit drove him into the moon's surface hard enough to send a circular shockwave racing outward for miles.

He answered with a beam—pure ultrawhite, straight line annihilation.

I weaved through it, the light scraping past my face, and returned fire with cascading violet blasts that tore the terrain apart in layered explosions.

He twisted through them, absorbing some, redirecting others, and fired back with a wider, heavier surge.

I blinked sideways.

The beam detonated behind us, turning the horizon into a whiteout of collapsing dust and energy.

And then—

We stopped again.

Across from each other.

Breathing heavier now.

Auras no longer stable—just raw pressure leaking into reality.

Ultraviolet and ultrawhite light grinding against each other so hard the space between us visibly bent, like the universe was straining not to tear.

Dark Don rotated slowly toward me, ultrawhite energy curling around his fists like live wire caught in orbit. Each pulse didn't just spark—it *crack-CRACKED* the air apart, slicing invisible grooves through the lunar dust with a harsh SHHHRIP that lingered in the silence after every step.

His white, spiked hair flared brighter, whipping behind

him like it was being dragged through a collapsing star. The ground under his feet fractured with soft, delayed KRRR—KRRK—KRRK, like the moon itself was realizing too late that it should be afraid.

He walked forward.

Slow. Certain.

"I'm ending this," he said, voice low enough to feel heavier than sound, "and when I'm done... there won't be anything left in Celestia worth calling survivors."

My eyes burned violet.

The horizon stretched endlessly behind him—crater fields, broken spires, floating debris still drifting from earlier clashes—everything trembling like reality was holding its breath too long.

"DARK DON—REASON WITH ME!"

He vanished.

FWSSH—!

The uppercut hit before my words even finished landing. My body snapped upward as the moon's horizon *bent* behind me like a warped mirror.

Before I could stabilize—

KRAK!

He grabbed me mid-spin and slammed me sideways, ultra-white aura peeling off him in streaks of heatless flame. A second afterimage flashed—

FWOOM!

—and he was on my other side, twisting my arm, locking me in place.

"I'VE ALREADY REASONED!" he snarled directly into my face. "THIS IS REVENGE!"

His grip tightened.

"THEY TOOK HER FROM ME!"

ZIP—ZSH—ZIP!

Blink-teleports shredded the space around us.

A rib shot hit first.

THUD!

Then another strike launched me upward.

A beam ignited instantly from his palms—

VRRRRRR-KOOOOM!

Crescent-shaped blades spun inside it like orbiting saws, tearing a spiraling tunnel through the sky as it pushed me higher and higher.

He appeared above me in a snap.

Flipped.

And drove both feet down—

WHAM—!

The impact drove me straight into the moon's surface.

BOOOOM—KRSHHH!

Crater expansion rippled outward in jagged rings.

Before I could recover, something whipped around my side—

SWAP!

His tail caught me mid-rise and flung me through vacuum like a broken comet.

I twisted, stabilized—

"STOP—JUST LISTEN!" I shouted. "I GET IT! BUT THIS ISN'T THE WAY!"

He was already gone.

Not moving through space—*orbiting it*.

A blur of ultrawhite streaks circled me, firing rapid blasts that shredded the sky in chaotic bursts.

PEW—PEW—PEW—PEW!

The beams carved glowing scars across the void.

I swatted two aside—

KSH! KSH!

—spun through another volley, caught one mid-flight—

KR-TCH!

—crushed it into glittering dust.

Then—

A white fist dropped from above.

KRAAAACK!

Space itself fractured on impact.

The uppercut snapped my vision sideways, twisting stars out of alignment.

"HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT—!" he roared, appearing instantly beside me.

TOK! THMP!

Elbow. Forehead. Rib.

Three hits in a breath.

Then—

ZIP-ZIP-ZIP!

He circled again, faster, feral now.

"WHEN YOU HAVEN'T LOST ANYONE LIKE I DID!"

He slammed his head into mine—

KRA-DOOM!

—and I was launched downward like a broken meteor.

I crashed into Venus.

BOOOOOM—!

Molten plains erupted outward in shockwaves of orange and crimson heat.

I forced myself up through burning terrain—

Only to see the sky split open.

A colossal ultrawhite beam descended.

SCREEEEEEEE—KOOOOOM!

It hit.

Everything went white.

The beam swallowed the landscape, carving valleys in real time with violent CRRRAAASH-CRACK-CRACK distortions as it dragged across the planet's surface.

Inside it, my barrier flickered—

KRRK—KRRK—KRRK!

Barely holding.

I pushed back against the pressure—

But Dark Don was already there.

FWOOM!

He appeared inside the beam, twisted mid-motion, and kicked my face with brutal precision.

I flew—

A violet streak tearing through volcanic ridges.

KRSSHHH!

Rock and lava exploded around me.

I burst out of the crater, already moving, aura flaring.

FWOOM-FWOOM!

I shot forward through the heat haze, body cutting through distorted air like a blade.

He met me head-on.

My fist connected first.

THWAK!

His head snapped back, body launched like a fired projectile—

KRSSHHH!

He smashed through a mountain peak, debris raining down like burning meteors.

I landed hard, skidding across molten sand, shouting up at him—

"YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO UNDERSTANDS LOSS!"

My aura flared brighter, unstable.

"YOU'RE JUST A KID WHO GOT BROKEN AND NEVER HEALED!"

The air around me trembled.

"And hurting people won't bring her back—it'll just destroy you faster!"

Silence.

Then—

Everything stopped.

Dark Don hovered above the shattered ridge.

Ultrawhite energy spiraled upward from him like a screaming pillar, splitting clouds, bleaching the sky into pure static light. The atmosphere dimmed around his presence, like color itself was being drained.

His eyes warped—no longer human, just glowing pits of grief and rage collapsing inward.

A sound tore out of him.

Not a shout.

Not a roar.

Something worse.

"HRRAAAAAAAAH—!"

And then he dropped.

A divine missile.

FWOOSH—BOOOOM!

Straight at me.

| #1.45 — The Race to a Risk |

Bodies flew through the golden-tinted air like ragdolls in a divine blender.

Golden lightning split the yellow, shimmering clouds above, crackling down with vengeance. Blood spattered across broken stones and scorched skies.

Screams echoed, war cries rang out, and the sounds of slashes, stabs, and roars painted the battlefield in pure carnage. The squad sprinted across the chaotic warzone, grouped tightly, bolting toward the Celestial Pillars like it was the last checkpoint in the universe.

Jaylen, breathing heavy and eyes locked forward, suddenly backflipped mid-stride, morphing into his Dream Dragon form mid-air. His wings erupted outward, flaring with ethereal energy as he shot into the sky like a comet. "Let's make some noise!" he growled, ascending like a dream-fueled missile. Below, the battlefield was absolute insanity.

Celestianites and Lunaranites clashed in massive waves, and it was nearly impossible to tell who was winning. Olsen went full beast mode, plowing through enemy dragons like a runaway bulldozer. His hammer spun wildly in his fists, slamming down with bone-crunching force.

else transformed into their beast forms like it was morphin'

time. Mason tore through Lunaranites with his bear claws, literally ripping them limb from limb. Fedjina, now a golden falcon of fury, dive-bombed from above, releasing explosive bursts of golden energy that lit up the sky.

Archie (you know, chaos incarnate) launched himself upward with a fiery self-detonation, flipping mid-air and hurling a meteor-sized fireball across the battlefield that obliterated three Lunaranites mid-laugh. Above the madness, Jaylen weaved through the bullets, blasts, and incoming Alien Birds. His face twisted in frustration as he scanned the endless chaos ahead.

"WE'RE NOT EVEN CLOSE!" he roared, dodging a flaming spear mid-sentence. Flying next to him, William—in sleek Pterodactyl form—grimaced as he peered ahead.

The Celestial Pillars were still dots on the horizon, barely visible beyond the ocean of enemies. Jaylen ducked under another Alien Bird, blasted it with a focused Dream Beam, then spiraled in mid-air to keep momentum.

He barrel-rolled, flipped, corkscrewed sideways, then hit a horizontal drift to BOOST forward. "I'm flying like a lunatic and it's still not close enough!" he groaned. Suddenly, a streak of blue lightning zipped below—Prince, moving like a damn thunderbolt.

"YO, DON'T SWEAT IT!" Prince yelled, throwing up a confident thumbs-up mid-run.

"I GOT THIS, DREAM BOY!"

Jaylen chuckled, "Show-off," and veered to the side.

Down below, Prince was a blur. Moving faster than sound, he flipped, dodged, and drop-kicked anything in his path. Lunaranites didn't even get a chance to react—they were slapped into orbit or sent spinning into their comrades like dominoes

on turbo mode. He jumped, spun mid-air, and flash-kicked one Lunaranite straight into the upper atmosphere. Then, in a move so anime should've6 had a slow-mo zoom-in, he stopped, grinned, and whispered: "Time to crank it up."

Lightning danced around his eyes. He dashed forward again—harder, faster. His feet were just thunderclaps now, smacking the earth in sonic pulses. As Lunaranites closed in with spears, he dodged, punched, and drop-spin-kicked like a storm given human form.

He conjured an electrical shield, plowing through the crowd like a shockwave on legs, vaporizing everything in his path. Then he leapt, yeeted the shield like Captain America with ADHD, and fired off electric disks that exploded on contact—blinding flashes of white and blue tearing through the mobs. He snapped his fingers. BOOM. A thunderstorm erupted above.

To him, the clouds turned gray, roiling and violent. To everyone else? Still glowing gold. Lightning speared down in rhythmic strikes, vaporizing monster after monster.

Thunder shook the earth like a heartbeat of the gods. And still, Prince ran. Close—so close—to the Celestial Pillars.

Meanwhile...

Krane backhanded Duke so hard, the poor guy flew like a wrecking ball into a skyscraper.

Glass exploded, walls cracked, and Duke bounced through an entire floor before crashing into an office full of glowing computers. Smoke poured from his busted cannon. He groaned, shaking his head, rising to his knees. "Dang it... stupid robot arm..." Floating through the hole like he was on his villain arc

finale, Krane hovered with his arms crossed and a smug grin. "You really thought you could handle the power of a Zenith?"

Duke stood, glaring. "You're not laying a single finger on them..."

Krane just smirked.

"KRANE!!" a voice shouted. Overbrawl stood below, waving his arm. Krane rolled his eyes. "What now, muscle-brain?"

Overbrawl pointed, wide-eyed. Krane turned... and saw it. A blue lightning streak cutting through the entire army. Prince. Krane's smile faded. His gaze followed the path of destruction, right to the Celestial Pillars. And his brain clicked.

The pillars were the key. If Prince reached them, it was over. Krane clenched his fists. "Duke said they'd awaken Dreadixz and Incarceration... if we lose those pillars—" He vanished. Teleportation. Reappeared right next to Overbrawl, energy crackling around his arm.

"Let's kill him already," Krane growled. Overbrawl grinned, his own hand igniting with chaotic fire. "Bet." The two locked eyes, then slammed their fists together. BOOM. An enormous fireball of chaos and spirit swirled above them—blazing, volatile, unstable.

Then... They yanked their arms back, charging the energy until it roared like a dying star. They screamed in sync: "CHAOTIC SPIRITS!!!" And the ground split.

The fiery beam launched into the sky like a sunbeam from hell, headed straight for Prince—who didn't even flinch. The firebeam roared to life, lighting up the entire battlefield like a freaking solar flare gone rogue. Every warrior in their beast form turned to look—but only for a split second—before diving out of the way.

The beam slammed into the ground and raced forward, cutting

across the field at breakneck speeds. It didn't move—it hunted.

The air distorted with heat, the colors of orange and purple mixing into a wildfire blur that ripped through Lunaranites, vaporizing anything in its way without an ounce of mercy. Screams echoed, bodies dropped, and chaos erupted in its wake.

Through the smoke and flashing lights, Angel appeared in mid-air, hurling Lunaranites into different dimensions like it was Tuesday. He snapped his head around, eyes wide.

"PRINCE! BEHIND YOU!!"

Prince was already mid-charge, blitzing through Lunaranites with blue lightning crackling around his fists. He heard the warning, turned his head slightly and— "Hm?" His eyes widened. Behind him, the beam. And not just a beam—this thing looked like a supernova on legs, a predator locked on target. "AW HELL NAH—!!" Prince shouted, his voice nearly drowned by the roaring firestorm. He spun forward and BOOKED IT. His feet hit the ground like thunderclaps. Lightning exploded from his heels as trails of blue sparks lit the battlefield.

The terrain got wild—bumps, hills, debris—but Prince didn't stop. He vaulted over boulders, slid under claws, flipped, kicked, punched, twisted—Lunaranites got yeeted like bowling pins.

"Gotta move... or I'm toast!" he thought, sweat flying off his brow as lightning wrapped around his arms and surged into his hands. His legs blurred—gone. His eyes lit up with crackling energy. "FASTER!!!" he screamed—and he did just that.

Now he was a literal bolt, shooting across the battlefield, jumping so high he looked like a blue comet in the night. His dreads whipped like wild flags in the wind. Overbrawl and Krane, trying to control the beam, were sweating bullets.

"GO! GO FASTER!" they yelled, desperation in their eyes.

Prince landed hard, kept sprinting, then blinked—he was

already near the Room of Zeniths. "Almost there..." he muttered, glancing back at the death-beam on his tail.

He smirked, spun mid-run to face it while running backwards, and shouted, "HEY! WANNA PLAY TAG?! COME CATCH ME, LAMEFLAME!" He whipped around, and the world cut to black. Boom—he entered a void. The domain turned deep navy blue.

Metallic floor. No walls. Just endless nothingness.

But he kept running. He knew this place. His mind started flashing through memories—his friends, their battles, their laughs, their pain. Then he blinked again—he was back. Back in Celestia, feet slamming the earth. The tower was right there.

His body surged. 100,000% ELECTRICITY. His eyes glowed like dying stars. His legs? Nonexistent. Just rings of raw speed and crackling energy. He BLASTED up the side of the Room of Zeniths, running vertically now like a glitch in the matrix. The beam followed, now howling like a banshee as it gained speed.

"COME ON!!" Prince roared.

"COME ON!!!" Overbrawl and Krane echoed.

"COME ONNNNNN!!" the whole squad screamed from the ground.

Prince gritted his teeth so hard his gums bled. He clenched his fists and started disintegrating physics. He was now a living blur, faster than light, a sonic paradox with feathers. The beam got closer—dangerously close—almost licking his tail feathers. He felt its heat on his back. "Not today..." he muttered. Then—he did something no one had ever seen him do.

"RAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!" he screamed, louder than thunder as he blasted into the CLOUDS THEMSELVES. The sky cracked open. He sprinted on the clouds like they were solid ground. The clouds burned behind him. The lightning around him grew more violent, wrapping his entire

body until he was a full-on, glowing Lightning Avatar.

A literal humanoid bolt. And then... mid-air, in slow motion... He struck a running stance. With a smirk and a primal roar, he shouted: "*SOOOOOOOONIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIC—*" "***BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMM!!!***" He detonated. A colossal sonic boom rippled across the planet, launching everyone off their feet.

Wind spiraled into a hurricane. Buildings shook. The beam FLIPPED mid-air from the force and kept coming—but Prince? Prince wasn't done. He pushed harder. Ran higher. Screamed louder. Everyone below watched with bated breath as he climbed—no, catapulted—toward the Celestial Pillars at the tower's summit. He reached the top.

Launched himself like a rocket. And just when the beam almost caught his tail—he shot into the sky, breaking atmosphere, becoming a star. Everyone froze. Necks craned. Eyes widened. Hearts pounded. All attention locked on the sky—on him. Prince.

His hoodie whipped in the wind, flailing like a banner of rebellion. His lightning-charged shoes sparked and flickered, barely holding together. Dirt-smeared, scraped up, bruised to hell—but still standing. And smiling. He looked down, spotting it: the Celestial Pillar, glowing with a radiant green gem embedded at its heart. His eyes locked on target.

"There it is." That cocky grin spread across his face. "Time to end this." Then— BOOM. He blasted down from the clouds like a divine missile, the sky screaming behind him as he pierced through it. A thunderous shockwave rattled the heavens.

The beam—wild, chaotic, a roaring inferno of destruction—chased after him like a demon unchained. The final race had begun. Prince SLAMMED into the ground like living lightning, a crater forming beneath his feet at the base of the Celestial

Pillars.

Dirt and energy exploded outward. He didn't stop. He dashed, streaking straight for the green pillar like a man possessed. "GET IT, PRINCE!" Angel shouted, still fighting off hordes.

"COME ON, BRO!" Duke roared, fists clenched. The crowd went silent, time slowed. Even the Lunaranites—creatures of chaos and bloodlust—paused, baffled, confused, watching. Prince vaulted into the air, twisting over the pillar like a lightning acrobat, the beam screeching right behind him, breathing down his neck. Slow motion. Mouths opened in gasps.

Whispers turned into yells. The world held its breath. And then— BOOOOOOM. Prince's fist SLAMMED into the green gem—cracking it with pure raw thunder energy. Not even a millisecond later, the beam caught up— —and collided head-on with the gem.

The world. Went. White. An explosion of color detonated from the pillar—green, white, blue, gold—every color imaginable blasted across the sky, melting together like cosmic paint.

The shockwave shook the universe, slicing through clouds, air, even time itself. Alien birds flying high above were instantly vaporized, the atmosphere cracked, the heavens screamed. It was like a god had thrown a tantrum. The shockwave slammed into the earth. The wind didn't just howl—it roared. A hurricane spun out of the energy, hurling everyone into the air. Trees snapped. Buildings shattered. The battlefield turned into a blender of chaos and energy.

Lightning danced.

The sky bled light.

And in the middle of it all...

Prince was falling.

His body plummeted from the heavens like a broken star. His

hoodie flapped wildly. His arms limp. His body spun, crashing through golden rocks like a ragdoll in a pinball machine until—*CRACK*. He slammed into the side of a massive golden spire.

The impact echoed through the mountains. His body finally stopped, crumpling face-down in the dust. Silence. His fingers twitched.

His eyes squinted open, weak, bloodied, but alive. He slowly looked up—through the dust, the wind, the chaos—and saw it. The Room of Zeniths tower.

Still standing. Still glowing. Activated. He grinned through the pain. Broken, battered, but victorious. He did it. The crowd fell into an eerie silence. Was he... dead or alive? Overbrawl collapsed, finally succumbing to exhaustion after unleashing a massive attack that, unfortunately, did nothing. Krane caught him just in time, cradling him in his arms.

Whispers rippled through the crowd—fake Lunaranites, Celestianites, even the crew. A sea of murmurs. Then... silence again.

Olsen, standing right at the edge of the crowd, slowly stepped forward, gripping his hammer tightly. He made his way to Prince, who was slumped face-down against a rock, unmoving. With one tap of his hammer—nothing. Another tap—still nothing...

Then in a flash, Prince shot up and immediately broke into the Gangnam Style dance, hollering, "I DID IT! I DID IT! DID YOU GUYS SEE THAT?! I DID IT!"

He kept shuffling across the battlefield like he was auditioning for a decade-late K-pop comeback. The fake Lunaranites groaned in unison, clearly done, and instantly raised their spears in collective disgust. Olsen let out the world's heaviest sigh, looking like he was one second away from physically knocking

some sense into Prince.

He turned toward him with a deadpan stare and snapped, "We thought you were dead! Like—flatline, donezo, buried-in-a-music-video DEAD!" Prince just shrugged and flopped back against the rock like it was a recliner. "Well, guess I'm not. Isn't that nice?" he muttered with a smug grin. Olsen shook his head, somewhere between exasperated and ready to retire. Then, cutting through the weirdness, Ella's voice rang out—sharp, urgent: "LOOK!"

| #1.46 — The Return of the Bad |

A radiant green beam burst from the Regeneration Pillar—one of the towering Celestial Pillars of Avangard. It shot straight into the sky with a sound like a god sneezing through a megaphone. BOOM! The heavens trembled as the beam exploded into a brilliant bloom of emerald light, sending a shockwave racing across the battlefield like a tidal wave of color and power.

Everyone below froze. Eyes widened. Mouths dropped. Even the nightmarish monsters paused, blinking, confused. "Wait... what?" someone muttered—or maybe it was a monster. Hard to tell.

The shockwave rippled across Avangard, planet-wide. Mountains shook. Trees bent like rubber. Celestianites who'd been knocked out twice now stood up, dusting themselves off like it was just a nap.

The nightmares didn't die, but even they shuffled awkwardly, looking around like, "Uh... yeah, I'm outta here for a sec."

And then, there was Jocabed. Stepping forward, staring skyward. She whispered, "Ohhh... shhhhiit..." The golden clouds above erupted like the grand finale of a heavenly fireworks show. Lightning fizzled. Thunder packed up its gear. Even the wind seemed to say, "Yo... okay, that's beautiful."

Power clenched his fists, feeling destiny sparking in his bones. "Alright, this is it, everyone..."

Krane and Overbrawl flanked him, their gazes locked on the glowing sky. Krane's usual cool smirk was gone, replaced by that rare, wide-eyed intensity. Overbrawl just shrugged, flexing his chaotic muscles, like, *"Guess we're vibin' with cosmic fireworks today."*

Far above, Duke perched in the wobbling golden building—one that looked like it had skipped leg day—and his shadow fell across the cratered battlefield. At first, he looked inspired, jaw tight, ready to spring... then his eyes darted down. "...We better get ready," he muttered, "...like... now."

POP! Somewhere on the golden ground, Incarceration's eyes snapped open. Just the eyes. The rest? Still very much in pieces. His head rested on the ground like a dropped bowling ball, crimson gaze blinking twice, surveying the scene.

"Huh," he muttered. "I seem to be... detached."

The Celestianites tensed. Spears raised. Elements flared. Weapons drawn.

"Ohhh boy," muttered Archie, voice squeaky with equal parts dread and amusement. "Here we go again..."

Incarceration's head rolled forward with cartoonish determination. Thump. Thump. Thump. Rocks bounced, a Lunaranite dropped their lunch in sheer panic, and finally—click—his head snapped back onto his shoulders with a satisfying *DING!*

He stood, limbs jerking like a marionette in a chaotic puppet show. Bones popped. Back cracked. Legs did a funky little dance before he stabilized. Then he threw finger guns to nobody in particular.

"Ahhh. Feels good to be not-dead," he said with smug satisfaction.

Then... a pause. Brow furrowed. "...Why am I looking at my own butt?" He slowly twisted his head, realizing it was on backwards. Not heroic. Not intimidating. Just cursed action-figure vibes.

Overbrawl tilted his head. "...Uhhh, is that supposed to happen?"

Incarceration groaned. "Hold on—let me just..." He twisted his head 270 degrees, making a wind-up noise followed by a POP. "Much better. Alright! Now... what did I miss?"

"HEY!" Krane shouted, pointing like he was about to throw hands with just his index finger. His face was red, furious. "THAT'S MY WATCH! RIGHT THERE—ON YOUR ARM!"

All eyes flicked to the busted, glitching mechanical watch, sparking like it had survived a microwave apocalypse.

"This?" Incarceration squinted at it, crimson eyes gleaming. "This is just... junk." He flicked it off, tossing it to the ground like a cheap knockoff. Clink. Crunch. The already damaged watch fractured further.

He turned back to the crew, who were grouped like nervous middle schoolers about to face the ultimate science test.

"Ahhh, what's this?" he purred. "I thought you'd all be dead by now. Guess the rumors are true—kids really *do* outlive the adults these days."

"You're a full-grown man who should be retired by now!" William shouted, zooming in like a chaotic wind tornado. "You're ancient!"

Deadpan blink. Incarceration: "Ugh. I know, right? Back pain alone..."

But then a vibration sliced through the air. A presence. Something rocketing in at insane speed. Everyone's heads snapped to the horizon.

There—cutting through the sky like a missile of pure rage—Dreadixz. Screaming. Teeth clenched.

Duke leapt from the shattered building above, landing with a thunderous BOOM beside Krane and Overbrawl. The ground trembled under his boots. Together, they watched.

Dreadixz drew closer. Closer. Closer. A blur now, arm drawn back for a devastating punch.

And then—BANG!

Incarceration raised his arm, blocking the strike with a bone-shattering impact. A shockwave tore outward like a hurricane, ripping across the battlefield. Dirt, debris, and air screamed away. The Celestianites ducked instinctively. Incarceration? Still standing.

From behind his raised arm, he peeked at Dreadixz—foreheads nearly touching.

"How dare you come back... after I tossed you in the GARBAGE." He grabbed Dreadixz's arm and twisted.

"ARRGHHHHHHHHHH!" Dreadixz roared, crashing to the ground with a sickening THUD. "YOU BETRAYED ME! YOU LEFT ME—"

"OH, WILL YOU JUST SHUT UP?!" Incarceration snapped, slamming a foot into Dreadixz's chest with a gut-wrenching THUD. "THAT'S ENOUGH!"

The silence that followed was deafening. Every Celestianite froze. Every element's glow flickered in suspended tension.

Javier—the quiet one. The sweetheart. The cinnamon roll. The dude who apologized when people bumped into him. He had just yelled. Loud. Krane, Overbrawl, Duke, Dreadixz... even Incarceration turned to look at him with stunned expressions. Incarceration narrowed his crimson eyes, dark energy starting to pulse behind them.

His voice dropped low and venomous. "...What did you just say?"

"I SAID—ENOUGH!" Javier's voice roared again, louder than before, shaking the tension in the air like lightning in a bottle. "I DON'T CARE WHO STARTED WHAT! I DON'T CARE WHO'S ANGRY OR WHO GOT BETRAYED! THE WORLD IS FALLING APART, AND I'M DONE LISTENING TO YOU GUYS WHINE AND FIGHT!" He reached behind his hoodie and drew a sleek, gleaming white katana, the blade forged from pure Celestian steel.

He flicked a hidden black switch on the hilt—click—and the weapon hummed with power. "You've got two options," Javier growled. "Deactivate the Celestial Pillars... or I'll make you. By. Any. Means. Necessary." Silence. Incarceration blinked. Everyone gasped. Even the villains looked like they'd seen a ghost. Overbrawl fainted. Again.

"WHAT IS WITH THE FAINTING?!!" Krane shouted, catching him like it was déjà vu. "GET SOME IRON OR SOMETHING!"

Prince stood up, electricity crackling in his hair. "You better listen—Javi kick your creepy ancient butt to next year!"

Archie's fists ignited with blazing orange fire. He grinned. "What's it gonna be?"

Incarceration's expression hardened. He slowly turned to Javier, locking eyes with the boy who had just stood up to him. Red energy cracked like glass across his face, spiderwebbing from his eyes. A sinister crimson light pulsed from his fists. He stepped forward, the ground beneath him sizzling with dark energy. "...You," he growled, voice heavy with rage, "have chosen death... my son."

In a burst of light blue energy, Javier materialized in front of him like a streak of midnight lightning. His katana sliced

across Incarceration's cheek, and darkness swallowed everything. Incarceration's eyes snapped open—but instead of the battlefield, he found himself inside a vast, swirling domain of deep, ominous blue.

Shadows flickered in his vision—phantoms of Javier flashing in and out—while he prowled the space, eyes glowing fierce electric blue. Without warning, Javier streaked past, slashing him with his crackling sword. The force sent Incarceration flying through the air.

He flipped backward, fists crackling with power, then charged down at Javier. But Javier slid aside, fluid and untouchable. In one swift motion, he grabbed Incarceration's leg mid-charge, slamming him into the ground. The impact unleashed a shockwave that rippled across the battlefield. Dirt and debris flew like a wild storm. Incarceration tumbled, flipped, and slid across the earth, barely regaining footing before Javier was already speeding toward him—earth layers levitating behind him like a chasing shadow.

The katana gleamed. With a blur, Javier slashed past him, each strike a sharp flash of blue electricity. Incarceration scrambled to catch his bearings, eyes darting as Javier closed in, finally cutting a fierce strike across his face. He skidded across the ground, fists clenched tight, dark nightmare energy swirling like a storm within him.

Javier vanished—reappearing behind him in a furious barrage. The strikes came at impossible speed, relentless, unstoppable. Incarceration dodged furiously, but one slash broke through, embedding itself in his arm. A shockwave tore through the land. Javier's eyes flared brilliant blue.

Then—hundredfold. Clones of Javier erupted behind him, electrical katanas drawn, charging with deadly precision. In-

carceration narrowed his eyes, spinning and slashing through them in a whirlwind of crimson fury. He blasted himself into the air, cutting down clone after clone—but Javier was relentless. With a brutal strike from behind, he slammed Incarceration back to the ground.

Rolling and tumbling, Incarceration struggled for control, but Javier manipulated the very air itself—compressing it, crushing him like a weight too heavy to bear. Pinned beneath the invisible force, he looked like he was drowning in solid matter. Then, a snap of Javier's fingers: a blue streak of light slashed across his eyes, carving an X-shaped scar glowing icy cold.

Javier plunged his katana into the earth. The ground cracked—once, twice—shaking violently. Ten massive layers of earth lifted behind him, levitating like an unstoppable tidal wave. With a commanding throw, he sent his sword flying at Incarceration, ordering the earth layers to follow. Incarceration burst from the ground, fists hammering the layers away in crimson explosions.

Rocks flew like missiles. He struck the last one—but failed to notice Javier's sword slicing through the air—severing his limbs cleanly, sending them spinning in a grotesque ballet. Before he could react, Javier surged forward, katana blazing with blue energy, grabbing the weapon mid-flight. Gravity bent to his command as he hurled Incarceration crashing through a massive rock—glitching, warping, transforming into a monstrous arm.

Javier skidded to a halt, katana stabbed into the ground, eyes blazing electric blue.

"RAHHHHHHH!!!!" His roar thundered louder than a storm. He charged like a living blue comet, pure energy streaking toward his enemy, ready to impale.

Incarceration's eyes flared crimson. "RAH!" His fists ig-

nited in crimson nightmare flames. The collision exploded—apocalyptic force, shattering the ground, ripping through the domain Javier had created.

Shockwaves obliterated everything—Celestian warriors, fake Lunarites, monstrous beasts—turning the battlefield into a hellscape. The sky bled red, the land trembled violently, cracking and rupturing under raw power.

Buildings crumbled. The sky glitched. The ground split.

Javier hurtled through the clouds, unconscious, crashing like a meteor, tumbling violently across the ground.

"JAVI!" Keyler's shout cut through the chaos. Sprinting toward him, eyes blazing, he dodged the storm of flames and destruction.

Amid the howling wind and burning crimson nightmare, Incarceration stood unshaken—the one and only Insane X, clenched fists radiating power. The sky trembled, clouds flashing red and gold, twisting into a deep blood-red inferno. Through swirling smoke and dust, Starla stood firm, eyes locked on him, pushing herself up with a mix of worry and steely determination. sidestepped and raised his arm to block the incoming strike. The magma exploded outward in a thunderous BOOM.

Grabbing Guerven's arm like a ragdoll, he threw him aside with brutal ease. Jaylen was about to launch a punch when Incarceration snapped his fingers sharply — a clear warning. Jaylen froze mid-step. "You know," Incarceration said, voice dripping with sinister amusement, "when I say I love kids, I mean it..." Daysni, from across the devastation, rolled her eyes and shouted, "Yeah! You've told us that way too many times!!!"

"It's because you don't understand," Incarceration growled darkly. "When I say I love kids, I mean I love their fear. They're

so easy to scare, even the bravest ones. I've terrified newborns, toddlers, kids, pre-teens, teens, young adults — all of them! Don? The easiest of them all. His fear of embarrassment, his social anxiety? Perfect tools for me. That's why I love kids — they're so damn fun to mess with." Red nightmare energy crackled wildly around him as he turned his gaze upward, toward the Celestial Pillars where the Power Gems hovered. Duke's eyes widened in horror, understanding instantly what was about to happen.

"Don't do—" Duke yelled. But before he could finish, Incarceration's thunderous snap echoed through the sky, shaking everything to its core. Jaylen screamed, "Stop him now!" but it was already too late. The Power Gems floated above Incarceration's head, glowing fiercely as they orbited him. His red eyes swept over the scattered group, and a cruel chuckle escaped him. "Oh, what's the matter? Just a little villain having fun, right, Dreadixz?"

Dreadixz, standing beside him, smirked knowingly. Though betrayed, they shared one purpose: Don had to be erased. Permanently. No matter the cost. Jocabed unsheathed her snowflake shurikens, but slowly, she let them fall — she knew they were useless. "Are they doing what I think they're doing?" she whispered. The Power Gems circled the two villains as they began to levitate. Incarceration crossed his arms, rising steadily into the crimson sky, while Dreadixz grinned like he'd just hit the jackpot, surveying the terrified teens below. The nightmare energy intensified, crackling like wild lightning around Incarceration. His smirk deepened as he ascended higher and higher. "Kids, this is what real power looks like," he sneered.

"I'll have a new name soon, sorry if 'Incarceration' sounds

boring." The energy reached a fever pitch, shaking the ground beneath them all. Then, in a blinding flash, Incarceration roared at the top of his lungs: "*RAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!*" Five shockwaves erupted from Insane X's body, each one blazing a deep, blood-crimson red.

A massive scarlet streak burst from him, shooting straight up into the sky like a fiery spear. Simultaneously, Dreadixz unleashed his own cosmic fury—a colossal galaxy-colored streak tearing through the heavens, screaming and crackling with wild energy. Ten shockwaves in total shook the air and ground, throwing everyone off balance. Teeth clenched, hands digging into the earth, they watched those blazing streaks pierce the darkening sky. With a synchronized swipe of their arms, Insane X and Dreadixz revealed their true forms. Suddenly, the sky blackened. Insane X floated ominously in his full, terrifying glory. Four powerful arms stretched out, and twelve glowing red eyes pierced the gloom.

A massive X-shaped scar marked his forehead, burning with fierce intensity. The same blazing red X adorned his jet-black chest, pulsing with dark energy. Huge ripped dragon wings, blood-red and ragged, unfurled behind him. Eight muscular black spider legs emerged from his back, flexing with raw power. His teeth were sharp and menacing, claws razor-sharp—deadly weapons forged from the depths of nightmare itself.

The darkness in the sky wasn't just from Insane X's terror—it was because Dreadixz loomed nearby, a colossal galactic dragon the size of a small galaxy. His skin was pure black, shimmering with countless twinkling lunar stars. His eyes burned bright nova blue, glowing with cosmic power. Blue and violet energies swirled violently around him, a spiraling galaxy swirling beneath his massive form. His glowing nova-colored

horns and razor-sharp black claws looked like they were forged by the stars themselves.

The galactic dragon's piercing gaze locked onto the team, while Insane X hovered high beside him, exuding dread and raw power. Olsen clenched his teeth, Prince tilted his head in curiosity, Archie's arms burst into flames as sweat dripped down his face, and Demaurion glared with pure hatred. "YES!!" Insane X's voice thundered like a storm crashing through mountains. "I CALL THIS FORM—**INSANE X: LORD OF NIGHTMARES!!!**"

A jagged, glowing red spear glitch-formed in his massive hand. Gripping it tight, he pointed it down at the group below, a wicked grin spreading across his many-eyed face. "YOU REALLY THOUGHT YOU COULD BE HEROES OF AVANGARD AGAINST THIS? THINK AGAIN!"

His gaze snapped to outer space, eyes sharpening as his grin widened. Two streaks of light—one violet, one pure white—clashed fiercely in the darkness near the moon. Turning back to the stunned crowd below, his twelve eyes absorbing every detail, he snarled: "I guess it's time to go kick some cosmic ass..." With a burst of energy, he shot upward, tearing through the atmosphere in a blazing red streak. Behind him, Dreadixz floated in space, struggling to catch up to Don and Dark Don's fierce battle.

Starla's voice cut through the chaos one last time, dripping with fury and fierce hope.

"HE'LL KICK YOUR ASSES!"

They were gone. Starla collapsed to her knees, eyes fixed on the fading sky.

Jaylen stood beside her, silently watching.

Then he turned to Duke, who stood with Krane and Overbrawl.

"Please... kick their asses Don."

| #1.47 — From Enemies to Allies |

I dropped into my stance just as he flashed in — FWSSH — a streak of ultrawhite light tearing across my vision. His fists CLANGED against my forearms, each impact ringing sharp, like metal smashing metal. Then, a colossal white beam BOOMED outward, unfurling like a supernova and streaking across the planet, vaporizing half the landscape into glowing dust.

Dark Don stopped caring about physics. He flickered in every direction at once, his body stuttering through reality with rapid-fire ZIP-ZIP-ZIP bursts as he unloaded a barrage of punches — a million blinding strikes hammering my face and ribs in a nonstop BRRRT-BRRRT-BRRRT.

He spun with a vicious twist, WHIP-KICKING me upward before his palm opened and detonated a massive lunar blast — KRA-THOOM — ripping across my body and launching me into the sky like a fired comet. I spiraled through the air, tearing through clouds in a violet blur, the atmosphere screaming around me.

He flashed overhead instantly, spinning like a deranged celestial tornado before SMASHING me downward with a meteor-drop kick. I plummeted, air shredding into white contrails around me as he blitzed left and right — each pass slamming a

glowing streak against my body, forming a blinding white halo that rippled faster and faster as I tore past a mountain peak.

He zigzagged around me and stopped dead mid-air. His palms spread apart. A massive white orb of lunar energy BLOOMED around him, vibrating and pulsing like a living star. I shot straight through it — FWOOOM — scanning wildly for him. Too late.

Dark Don ricocheted off the energy sphere at light speed, blinking so fast he was nothing but violent white afterimages. I couldn't track him — only felt the moment his heel CRACKED across my cheek so hard space buckled, and we transitioned straight into Neptune.

We CRASHED into Neptune's roaring storm clouds, RRRAAAAAHHH ripping from his throat as he tore the sky open. He flashed toward me and I twisted around him, firing ultraviolet beams and celestial blasts that SHREDDED through the storm as he hunted me like a rabid comet.

We spiraled through the raging blue clouds, firing shot after shot — KOOOM, SHRRAK, WHOOOM — ripping holes in the sky until he blinked in front of me and slammed a fist across my cheek with a brutal THWAK. I flew straight into Mars.

The red planet erupted around me as Dark Don crash-grabbed my head, dragging me across the entire surface and carving trenches miles deep. His punch hit so hard we ripped through multiple dimensions — flipping, twisting, colliding through fractured realities — KRASH, VRRM, THOOM-THOOM-THOOM — each strike splintering existence like breaking glass.

He didn't stop. He didn't slow down. Dark Don kept hammering away, strike after strike after strike, until he twisted behind me, flashed forward, and SLAMMED me back onto the moon with a devastating KRA-BOOOOM that split the lunar surface

wide open.

I crashed onto the ground, lunar dust and dirt erupting upward as Dark Don's leg SLAMMED into my ribs — THOOM — pinning me like a boulder. His fists followed instantly, BLURRING into my face — WHAM-WHAM-WHAM-WHAM — each strike dripping with raw rage and heartbreak.

Every hit carried a violent pulse — KRK-THWAK, BAM, CRACK — his breath ragged, aura flickering with furious light. I twitched, tried to rise — SMASH! — another strike slammed me back down. Again. And again. And again.

Dark Don hammered me relentlessly — BRRRT-BRRRT-BRRRT — tears streaming from his eyes, mixing with blood splattering across the cratered moon. "THEY WERE LIARS!"

My Ultra Form was slipping from me.

He paused for a heartbeat, chest heaving, eyes darting as the ultrawhite glow on his own body waned. "THEY WERE DECEIVERS!" he barked, voice cracking. His Ultra Form was unraveling too — light dimming, aura flickering, his real form slowly emerging beneath the dying cosmic fire.

Snarling, teeth gritted until almost cracking, he turned back to me — fists spiraling with lunar energy — and unleashed another storm. Each punch — THUD, CRACK, SMACK — sent more blood spraying across the moon's surface. "THEY WERE MURDERERS!"

His hands were soaked, dripping red, every knuckle glowing with it.

He pulled back, lunar energy coiling violently around his fist. The final blow came — a falling star in his palm — KRAA-THOOOM! I cratered into the ground, debris and dust flinging upward as the shockwave rattled the entire moon.

Dark Don roared — voice broken, torn, shaking — "SILICIA!"

He slammed me again — BOOOOM — driving me deeper into the lunar crust. "THIS IS FOR YOU!" Another strike — THUDOOOM — burying me meters further. "YOU NEEDED THIS!"

And for the first time... I saw him cry. Actual tears. Not fury, not rage, but grief — pouring down his face as he kept hammering me into the moon. My vision blurred, swimming red with blood and dust, every punch detonating like a mini-apocalypse — KRRRSH, THOOM, KRUNG — driving me lower, lower, lower into the crust.

Dark Don loomed over me, chest heaving, aura pulsing like a wounded star. His fist hovered inches from my face, fingers curled tight, energy crackling like it wanted to tear the world apart. "This was the moment I've been chasing," he hissed, chest heaving, "the kill he was destined for, the one the Celestianites feared, the prophecy demanded, the Multiverse whispered about." His eyes flashed closing them as he readied for the punch. "I'm sorry..." His fists thrust forward—then, in the split second before it landed, memory snapped.

MOONFORGE NINE — 4 years ago

Chains cut into his wrists, harsh lights burning his eyes.

Silicia, pale and trembling, kneeling in front of him. A Lunaranite guard leveled a gun at her head.

Her voice was soft. Almost fragile.

"If I don't survive... don't get angry," she whispered.

"Everyone has a point in their lives where it just... ends."

Her eyes glimmered like starlight in the dim room.

"Promise me... don't hurt anyone because of me. Even if you do get angry... just know—I'll be with you. In your heart."

The shot echoed. The world froze. Silicia's smile flickered out.

—

The moon returned, silence exploding around him.

Dark Don froze mid-strike, eyes wide. His jaw tightened. His fist trembled. The energy around him sputtered, like the universe itself was holding its breath.

What was her promise?

That question hammered through his skull, louder than any scream, heavier than any punch he'd thrown. Everything he'd done—every life taken, every bridge burned—suddenly collided in that one moment.

He sank to his knees, no powers, no fire. Just him. Dark Don. The boy beneath the rage.

My Ultra Form flickered and died too. I gasped, chest heaving. His hands—bloodied, dirtied, shaking—hovered before him like alien strangers. He stared at them, disbelief and horror in his gaze.

His head hung low. Tail limp. Aura dead. Exhaustion, guilt, and rage twisted together into something raw, something broken.

With a sudden snap of frustration, he slammed against a moon spire, slid down, and just... stayed there. Wrecked.

I limped forward slowly, careful not to trigger any more storms. I sat beside him. No words. Just... the quiet weight of space around two shattered souls.

"...Are you okay?" I whispered.

He didn't answer at first. Eyes lost in the void. Then, barely audible:

"Why ask? There's... no redemption. Not for me."

I tilted my head. "Then why'd you stop? You could've finished me."

A shudder ran through him. "They hurt me... And even when I had the chance to kill you, I didn't."

His arms wrapped around his knees, body trembling.

"Revenge isn't always the answer," I said softly.

He looked at me, pain slicing through his gaze like shattered glass. "Don... I've hurt everyone. I wanted to erase entire tribes... for her. But she... she wouldn't want this. She told me not to get angry. Not to hurt anyone. And I... I broke that promise. Everything I've done... I betrayed her."

I breathed slowly. "Then make it right. We can fix this. Together. I'll guide you back, but you gotta trust me."

His eyes flicked to my hand. To me. To Earth. Back to me.

A small, jagged laugh escaped him—dark, raw, but human.

A smile, faint and broken, cracked through.

"You're the best rival I could've asked for... the best."

I groaned, "Bro, don't get soft on me—"

"I still hate you," he said, voice low and deadly.

"OH COME ON—"

"But," he added, smirking despite everything, "I like you... as a rival."

I laughed too, finally. We shook hands under the stars, dust of battle still clinging to us.

"Yeah... I like you as a rival too."

Then—something caught my eye.

I turned my head toward Earth, and that's when I saw it. A red streak—no, a blazing crimson missile—was rocketing straight toward us at max speed. It wasn't just red; it was blinding. Like a comet dipped in blood and set on fire. Like something that escaped from the pits of hell.

"What is that?" Dark Don muttered, squinting at the oncoming blaze. The streak moved faster—way faster—like a meteor about to crash into the moon at lightspeed.

I took a step back, heart pounding. It was getting closer. Closer. Too close.

"AGH!" I shouted as a blinding red light exploded in front of us, flashbanging me and Dark Don. I dropped to my knees without meaning to—my body moved on its own, like something forced me to kneel. Dark Don was doing the same. My muscles screamed to move, to fight back, but it was useless. I was locked in place.

Then I looked up through the blinding haze.

The red streak swooped down, descending like a nightmare comet, and SLAMMED into the moon's surface with a colossal shockwave. The entire moon quaked. Dust clouds erupted. The impact was so violent it messed up Dark Don's hair—dude looked like he just walked out of a wind tunnel.

I gritted my teeth, gripping my horns to avoid being dragged by the pressure. But the force was insane. Still, I held my ground. The dust began to settle.

And standing in the center of the crater... was Incarceration.

Eight massive, black spider-like limbs burst from his back—hairless, sharp, and gleaming like blades. His body pulsed with raw red energy. Twelve glowing red eyes blinked at once, burning with a nightmarish light. Tattered, blood-red dragon wings flared out behind him, and his mouth stretched into a wicked grin, rows of dagger-like teeth gleaming.

He flicked his tongue like a lizard. Then he clenched his clawed fist.

"What—a SIGHT—to see you two!" he cackled.

Red energy flared across his body, licking his skin like living

fire. The ground beneath him cracked. His twelve eyes blazed as the flames pulsed, surrounding him in a vortex of rage.

"INCARCERATION! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!" I shouted, my voice cracking through the roar of his aura.

He tilted his head, grinning wider. "Sorry... I'm just in my Ultra Form, ready to kill the both of you with no problem. Your friends realized—that without me, the pillars cannot be deactivated. They brought us back to life using the power of the Regeneration Gem, but we had other ideas..."

Before we could even react, he vanished.

BOOM.

In an instant, he appeared in front of Dark Don and punched him so hard in the chest that it sent him flying through the moon like a missile. A red explosion erupted on the other side, lighting up the moon like a burning orb. Shockwaves rippled across the surface, tearing craters into existence.

Incarceration turned to me.

"Your turn."

He teleported right in front of me, uppercutting me straight into the air. Before I could recover, he grabbed my leg, spun midair, and yeeted me across the lunar landscape. I crashed through mountain ranges, spires, and half-destroyed silver towers. My body skidded across the moon's surface, kicking up a storm of dust.

My mask whipped behind me in the wind. I slammed my fists into the ground and gritted my teeth as Dark Don suddenly teleported beside me, his body crackling with lunar energy. He stood firm, eyes locked on Incarceration, analyzing every move.

"He's not lying when he said that he was in his Ultra Form," Dark Don said. "He tapped into the Power Gems somehow... judging by his output, he might be reality-level strong."

I forced myself upright beside him, smirking through the pain—blood on my teeth, stars in my vision.

"Dark Don," I muttered, cracking my neck. "You ready to beat the fear outta this dude?"

Incarceration laughed. Not loud. Not rushed.

Amused.

"Oh, I'm not alone..."

FWOOOOM—

The heavens split.

Dreadixz descended from above, wings blazing like solar flares, scales rippling with galaxies trapped beneath glass. He was huge—a living constellation, a myth ripped straight out of cosmic scripture. Whatever the Power Gems had done to him, it didn't just enhance him.

It rewrote him.

Dark Don narrowed his eyes, lips curling into a feral grin.

"THEN I'LL TAKE ALL OF YOU ON—AT ONCE!"

I cracked my knuckles, energy buzzing under my skin. "You heard him." I snapped a look at Dark Don. "Tiny correction—we will."

He scoffed. "Try not to slow me down."

Too late.

FWOOOOSH—

Light detonated around me as I snapped into Ultra Form. Power collapsed inward like a dying star, then exploded. My eyes burned with blazing KX symbols, carved in pure light. Energy poured off me in violent waves, warping space around my body.

Beside me—

Dark Don shifted.

BWAAAM—

His Ultra Form ignited, aura flaring lunar-blue, cold and

divine. XK symbols burned in his eyes as his presence crushed the air itself—silent, heavy, unstoppable.

Incarceration smirked, glancing up at Dreadixz.

"Heh... that's not confidence." His eyes gleamed crimson. "That's stupidity."

He vanished.

CRACK—

A red blur slammed into me like a meteor. His hand locked around my throat and—

BOOOOOOM—

We launched skyward at lightspeed.

The pressure crushed my chest. Space screamed around us. Stars streaked past as we collided again and again—BAM! KRAAASH! SHOCK!—each impact rattling constellations, bending gravity.

Planets spun helplessly in the distance, their orbits trembling as our battle tore through the void.

He twisted midair—WHAM—

A razor-sharp kick.

I blocked with my forearm and countered—

BOOOOM!

My punch detonated, a crimson shockwave rippling through space like a wound in reality.

But I lost ground—

WHOOOSH—

I was launched backward, slamming into the moon—SKRRAAAASH!—skidding across the surface, carving trenches through lunar dust.

Nightmare Blasts.

Red spheres rained from the sky.

I flipped up, sprinting backward across the moon—THUMP

THUMP—dodging with spins, flips, razor-tight sidesteps. Each blast vaporized craters behind me.

One mistake and I was gone.

Out of the corner of my eye—

Dark Don and Dreadixz clashed across the stars. Just streaks now. Lunar blue. Violent violet. Pure destruction in motion.

No time to watch.

Incarceration appeared in front of me.

I ducked—

Teleported—

Tornado kick—

He vanished.

My eyes widened.

BOOM!

He reappeared beneath me and punched me straight into the heavens.

I spiraled upward, smashing through stars like shattered glass—CRASH CRASH CRASH—

He was there again.

Floating.

Five massive red energy orbs orbited him, chains of dark matter writhing behind them.

Snap.

They launched.

I didn't flinch.

I grabbed the chains midair—CLANG!—twisted, and hurled him downward—

BOOOOOOM!

He slammed into the moon, carving a crater so deep the surface screamed.

I rocketed down, fist glowing—

But he blitzed upward—

CRASH!

Mid-strike collision.

Teleport.

Backhand.

My body became a violet streak—

WHHHHHAM!

Venus.

Atmosphere shattered as I slammed through like a meteor. Dust, fire, lightning spiraled.

Everything stopped.

Time froze.

Incarceration hovered above me, casually snapping his fingers.

Reality bent.

A million punches.

No exaggeration.

Each strike hammered my body as time crawled—THUDTHUDTHUDTH flickered around me, screaming as he finished with a Tornado Kick that sent me screaming through Venus's clouds.

I folded midair.

Hard.

KRRRAAASH!

I smashed through a massive structure, rubble exploding outward.

But I wasn't done.

I backflipped and launched—

"RAAAAAH!"

Our fists collided—KRAK!—stars clashing. I kneed his gut, grabbed his head, and dragged him across the atmosphere, both of us tearing the sky apart like twin comets.

He skidded—then reversed direction.

Running backward.

I fired celestial blasts nonstop. He teleported between explosions like a living nightmare.

Flash—

Kick—

I flew upward—

He became a sphere of nightmare energy—

SLAAAAAM!

Venus cracked.

Mountains split. Lava erupted.

He lunged with spider-leg strikes—

I kicked him skyward and chased.

Tentacles fired like machine guns—

I spun, dodged, and slammed him through mountains one after another.

And then—

I snapped.

Violet light erupted from my body.

I became a celestial vortex, tearing through the atmosphere. Every spin carved divine blades through the planet.

I caught him mid-skid—

Spun—

BOOOOOOM!

My foot crushed down on his head.

He flew across Venus, carving a trench miles long.

I teleported ahead, grabbed his neck, dragged him across the surface—breaking sound, breaking light—

Then I vanished above him.

I screamed—

"ULTRA FIVE HUNDRED CRACKS!"

Impact.

Darkness.

Then—

Nothing.

Reality shattered—KRRRSHHH!—five hundred violet fractures spider-webbed through the void. The final punch erupted into a beam that swallowed him whole.

He screamed.

He roared—

"RAHHHHH!"

A red explosion detonated, canceling the beam, shaking the cosmos.

I hovered, shaking, exhausted.

Eyes opened in the sky.

Dozens.

Hundreds.

Crimson nightmare eyes.

Incarceration floated above, arms crossed.

He raised a finger and drew a kanji in the air:

— Fight.

The eyes burned red.

Five binding beams fired.

They twisted. Curved.

Venus went black.

BOOM.

The planet vanished in red-white light.

I was inside it.

Broken.

Flying.

Before I could breathe—

He appeared.

Slam.

Kick.

Barrage.

Faster than lightning.

Time slowed.

"INSTANT REALITY LOSS!"

A tap.

And I exploded into a red dimension of watching eyes.

Whispers.

Movement.

He flickered everywhere.

Appeared beside me.

Whispered—

".."

Death.

Tap.

My body detonated.

Bones shattered. Vision vanished.

I was launched—

Back to space.

Back to the moon.

WHAM.

His final punch crushed my face into the ground, carving a crater that shook Earth itself.

I lay there.

Broken.

Beaten.

Exhausted.

| #1.48 — The Final Battle of the End |

"JAVIER! JAVI, CAN YOU HEAR ME?!" Keyler's voice cracked as he dropped to his knees beside his fallen friend.

Javier didn't respond. His eyes were shut tight, face pale, and his body limp. But he wasn't gone—Keyler felt the slow thump of his heartbeat against his back as he lifted him up.

It was weak, but it was there. There was still hope. The skies above were still drenched in that haunting scarlet red. The battlefield below had gone quiet—Celestianites gathering in hushed clusters, watching as the last of the fake Lunaranites retreated. Everyone's eyes were drawn upward, past the blood-colored clouds, to the real storm unfolding beyond the atmosphere.

Don and Dark Don—two sides of the same soul—were locked in a relentless tag-team brawl with Incarceration, their strikes lighting up space like fireworks. Beside them loomed Dreadixz, now fully transformed into some kind of Galactical Dragon, his form so massive it made the stars look like dust.

He launched enormous lunar beams into the void. Dark Don fired back with ruthless blasts. Don spun through the chaos with pinpoint kicks and pure speed, clashing with Incarceration over and over again—each impact echoing like thunder. Don wasn't just fighting for survival. He was fighting for his friends. For Avangard. For everyone below who looked to him as their last

hope.

The soldiers on the ground slowly lowered their spears, eyes locked on the sky. Silence spread like a wave. Even Starla, usually calm and composed, looked up with worry all over her face. Finally, Keyler staggered toward the rest of the crew, Javier still on his back. His legs trembled with exhaustion. "Lonnie! Heal him!"

"I'm on it!" Lonnie Mae replied, her voice sharp with urgency. Four vines instantly burst from her back, snaking toward the ground as she crouched. Keyler gently laid Javier down.

Off in the distance, Power sat with his arms crossed, watching everything unfold in space like it was some divine event. Lonnie leaned over Javier and did a quick check. Her vine gently tapped his chest—yes, there was still a heartbeat.

But she checked again for a pulse... nothing. She cursed under her breath, then stood up and closed her eyes. Two more vines erupted from her back, now six in total.

They wrapped around Javier like protective serpents, lifting him slightly off the ground.

"This is going to take a while," she said through gritted teeth. "I'm gonna need every vine I've got."

Power watched from afar, still silent. The war in space only grew louder, brighter—blinding flashes cut across the sky, massive shockwaves tore through the atmosphere, and the sound of teleportation blasts echoed like roaring cannons.

Every eye in Avangard was locked on the sky. In Iris Town, the largest screen mounted atop the clocktower flickered to life, the news blaring into the night. A breathless reporter stood in front of a crowded street, villagers, children—even pets—huddled behind him, watching the sky.

"This is Breaking Avangardian News!" the reporter shouted

into his mic. "We're witnessing a live cosmic battle above our world—Don and Dark Don versus an evil Zenith and a galactic dragon. Is this the end? We don't know—but we're watching history in the making!"

In Eclitsic, another broadcast cut in: "Eclitsic News confirms: Don the Celestianite and his rival-turned-ally Dark Don have joined forces against Incarceration and a colossal dragon beast. This... this could be the final stand."

News anchors across the globe chimed in:

"Is this the end of Avangard?" "Is the world... cooked?" "Lock your doors, stay indoors! This isn't a drill!" "A prophecy kid versus a cosmic monster and a Zenith? This might be the craziest event in our history!"

Through all the noise, the fear, the disbelief, Power stayed quiet. Thinking. Processing. He didn't know how this would all play out. But there was one thing he did know deep in his soul: Don and Dark Don were going to win this fight.

Meanwhile, in the chaos of space...

Incarceration sighed. "Hope... is nonexistent."

His twelve nightmare-filled eyes blinked out of sync, glitching like a corrupted video file. He turned to me.

"Don... have you really forgotten who you are?" His voice sharpened, slicing the air. "You were nothing. They laughed at you—thought you were—entertainment, too stupid to fight his own shadow. You were never meant to matter."

I scoffed, smirking. "So what?" I said. "That was before."

I pointed straight at him, defiant. "They didn't know me back then—but they do now. And I know them. You're stuck in the past like it's a prison... but I broke free."

I looked down at Earth, my people, my team. From here, I could see everything—cities glowing, fans cheering, a banner flying through the sky:

'LET'S GO DON — OUR NEW KING!'

I turned back to Incarceration, my grin unshakable. "If it weren't for Olsen, Prince, Demaurion, Archie, Ella, Power—and yeah, even Starla..." I exhaled, my breath glowing like starlight. "I'd still be lost in my Scourge Don arc."

Incarceration's glare collapsed into something ugly.

"You think you've won?" he snarled. "You've still got Dreadixz to face."

He gestured.

The titan loomed beside him—planet-shadow massive, blotting out constellations, breathing starlight like smoke dragged from dying suns. Every exhale bent the void, gravity shuddering like it wanted to kneel.

"I may not be the final fight," Incarceration hissed, venom slick, voice coiling like a whip, "but to end that prophecy—"

His eyes ignited. Red fractals crawled outward, spreading like a living infection.

"I'll end you myself."

The universe paused.

No stars flickered.

No light moved.

I didn't blink. Didn't breathe.

Celestial energy stirred along my arms—not bursting, not flaring—hunting. Jagged veins crept over my skin, coiling around muscle and bone, vibrating impatiently—

KRRZZT—static rain snapping through the vacuum. The void itself began to whine, stretched thin, trembling like glass under a hammer.

"You wanna know something, Incarceration?" I said.

Too calm. Dangerously calm.

"I'm not afraid of you."

Beat.

"Or Dreadixz."

The power answered.

It surged—not outward, but upward—a spiraling column of violet-white radiance, climbing the air, peeling reality apart as it rose. Halos of light snapped into existence around my hands, rotating, folding, fracturing, breaking apart into ribbons that lashed and recoiled.

"Because this power?" My voice sharpened. "It isn't just mine."

I raised my hands—

Light lunged.

FWOOOOSH.

Energy flooded outward in crescent waves—not exploding, charging, sawing through the dark as molten lightning spilled like liquid fire. It crawled over the void, climbing nothing, devouring everything.

"It's theirs," I said. "Everything they gave me."

My eyes snapped open.

Violet-white fire burned behind them, fractured starlight, frozen radiance snapping and reforming with every heartbeat.

The air around my hands shuddered.

WHUM—WHUM

Two curved daggers peeled from the glow—celestial violet, crystalline, alive, edges fizzing with static mist. They didn't

hum. They snarled.

I crossed the hilts. Slammed them together.

BOOOOOOM.

The light collapsed inward—spiraling, compressing, folding—until a double-bladed sword ignited in my grip. Radiant. Brutal. Its core pulsed like a living heart, constellation-shaped fractures crawling along the edge, ribbons of light snapping back like leashes.

Behind me—

Dark Don stepped forward.

The void bent around him, warping, folding. His lunar spear ignited in his grasp—not summoned, forged—white lightning crystallizing into frozen moonfire. Arcs raced along its length—KRAK—KRRRSH—hammering gravity flatter.

I leveled my blade. Reality recoiled.

"You wanna erase hope?" I said. "Too bad."

I stepped forward.

The instant my foot moved, the ground didn't react—space did. It folded inward like it had been hit from the inside.

Energy climbed my spine and snapped through my arms in violent arcs. Thunder didn't echo anymore. It pursued me through the void.

The blade ignited.

Halos stacked along its edge in collapsing rings of light.

"Because legends—"

The air tightened.

"Never—"

The sword released everything at once.

A storm of crescents and spirals detonated outward.

"Die."

BOOOOOOM.

We moved.

Not forward.

Through.

Space shredded into burning ribbons as Incarceration was launched backward across starfields, carving a screaming trench through the cosmos. Reality tried to close behind him and failed.

"DON'T LET HIM RESET THE FIELD!" I roared.

Dark Don vanished.

He reappeared mid-collapse.

Then again.

And again.

Reality stuttered under blink-step repetition, each re-entry stacking violent afterimages across the battlefield like overlapping blades of light.

BAM.

My blade pierced Incarceration's chest at the exact moment Dark Don's spear dropped from above.

The impacts synchronized.

The universe answered with layered shock.

A ring of mirrors collapsed inward around us.

DOOM. DOOM. DOOM.

I twisted mid-warp, carried by momentum that didn't belong to physics anymore.

Slash.

SHRRRAAASH.

Violet light carved through armor, through divine structure, through the idea of durability itself.

He was thrown beyond the system boundary.

Space followed him like it was injured.

A nebula swallowed us whole—liquid fire clouds folding into spirals of fractured starlight. Gravity rotated sideways. The

horizon cracked and reformed in broken angles.

I sprinted through nothing.

Not moving through space.

Removing it behind me.

Dark Don hovered above, inverted against collapsing sky.

"Up."

His spear flickered downward.

WHAM.

Incarceration was launched into orbiting altitude.

I frame-skipped beneath him, inverted mid-motion, and brought my blade down.

Lunar impact.

KRA—BOOOOOOM.

A yellow world split open beneath us, continents folding like paper under pressure they were never meant to survive.

I followed immediately.

He didn't fall.

He refused gravity entirely.

Behind me—

machine-gun pressure erupted.

RATATATATATAT—KSH—KSH—KSH.

Fists that weren't individual strikes anymore—just continuous collapse points in space.

I weaved through the gaps, blade flashing.

"TRY HARDER!"

I kicked upward.

Dark Don appeared above instantly, spear igniting like a falling star.

"Stay down."

Impact landed.

Stone vaporized. Flame climbed upward instead of falling.

My jaw snapped sideways under delayed force.

"UN-AMUSING!"

"TALK LESS!"

I rotated with the strike instead of resisting it, dragged my blade through his side, and kicked him into a magma-core crater.

Liquid fire erupted upward in violent columns.

Red annihilation energy condensed in his palm—dense, devouring, final-stage compression.

"DON—MOVE!" Dark Don shouted.

The beam fired.

I blinked aside at the edge of destruction, blade crossing the aftershock.

The recoil swallowed space.

"We reposition now?" I snapped.

"We escalate," Dark Don answered.

One slash from me cut through distance.

SHRRRASH.

He was launched into a burning star.

The star bent under his impact.

"Too bright?" I shouted, diving after him.

Dark Don hurled the spear.

"Then turn it off."

KAAAA—BOOOOOOM.

The star collapsed inward.

Erasing.

Silence replaced it instantly.

WHAM.

Incarceration ripped Dark Don out of folded space and smashed him into me.

"DARK!"

"I'M STILL HERE—HIT HIM!"

Nightmare Blast expanded.

Crimson annihilation filled everything, endless and directionless.

We moved through it in broken zigzag bursts—appearing, vanishing, reappearing, space peeling backward like torn fabric.

"YOU CAN'T STOP A GOD!"

"WATCH ME!"

FLASH.

Reality fractured completely.

We dropped into a broken dimension—stars bleeding color, gravity misaligned, geometry folding wrong like the universe had been assembled incorrectly.

A spider limb snapped around me.

I cut it mid-wrap.

Sparks scattered like collapsing galaxies.

Incarceration appeared everywhere at once.

Hundreds of strikes compressed into a single execution point.

"BREAK."

CRACK.

I was launched.

Before I drifted—

Dark Don caught me mid-flight, rotated once, and launched me back like a kinetic weapon.

"DON'T DIE ON ME!"

"NOT TODAY!"

Celestial fire detonated around me—spirals, halos, molten lightning threading through my limbs.

Incarceration grabbed Dark Don by the throat.

Red annihilation charged instantly.

"DARK DON!"

"I'VE SURVIVED WORSE!"

I warped in.

Blade crossed beam.

KRRRSHHH.

Spacetime split.

Dark Don vanished into distant layers of reality.

Everything went still for half a breath.

Then I snapped.

"HOW DARE YOU."

Space bent under my presence.

I grabbed Incarceration's arm and launched him upward through collapsing constellations.

"YOU TOUCH MY RIVAL—YOU DEAL WITH ME!"

Both hands rose.

Everything condensed into a single rule.

"ULTRA DISTINGUISH."

KAAAAAAAA—BOOOOOOM.

A beam of structured law dragged him through star systems, shattered worlds, and broken cosmologies before burying him into a collapsed dimension that sealed itself shut.

I landed beside Dark Don.

"...You hit harder when you're scared."

"I was aiming for controlled rage."

Dust drifted through broken starlight.

One red eye opened behind us.

"Behind you."

Dark Don moved instantly.

SHRRRK.

The limb was severed mid-attack.

Incarceration laughed.

"YOU STILL DON'T GET IT!"

My aura detonated outward.
Blade and spear collided one final time—
DRRRRIIIILLLLL.
The planet split clean through its core.
And for a moment...
everything stopped breathing.
King Dreadixz descended.
Planet-sized. A living galaxy.
I grinned.
"All in."
Dark Don hovered beside me.
"Try not to die before the real fight."
"No promises."
My sword ignited—twin supernovas burning along its edge.
"If I land one punch," I muttered,
"it's over."
I faced the king.
"You're a king and all..."
Celestial fire wrapped me—white, gold, screaming blue.
"But even kings die someday."
I drifted forward.
"This is it, Dreadixz," I said. My voice didn't shake.
"Your end."
SPACE FLINCHED.
Reality folded inward like it got punched in the gut—
—and King Dreadixz detonated into existence.

Nova-blue and blinding white energy exploded outward, ripping the void apart. His body reforged mid-air in violent stages—armor plates slamming together one by one, violet and hyper-charged blue locking in with thunderous CLANGS, like a war god assembling himself frame by frame.

His hair ignited—towering flames of cyan and white surging upward, a burning crown clawing at the dark. Behind him, a massive tail of stellar fire whipped and cracked, carving glowing scars through space like a living sun dragged on a chain.

He clenched his fists.

Star-white power flooded outward, pressure screaming.

"Don," he said, his voice echoing across layers of existence,

"this is your final battle. One you won't return from... nor remember."

I rolled my shoulders. Cracked my knuckles.

Energy hummed up my arms, lighting my veins.

"Cool," I muttered.

"Let's get unhinged."

We vanished.

Not moved.

Not flew.

Gone.

The distance between us collapsed into nothing.

I surged forward—

he flickered back.

Space folded like paper between heartbeats. I slipped past his shoulder—

GRIP.

His hand snapped around my arm and hurled me.

I turned into a comet.

Galaxies smeared into violent streaks as I spun—vision tearing—then I blinked, snapped behind him mid-throw—

—and SLAMMED my shoulder into his spine.

KRAAAAAASH.

A supernova shockwave detonated, ripping the vacuum apart. Dreadixz spiraled backward, crashing through a nebula in

space—a raw, screaming dimensional wound.

I chased him through it.

Up.

Down.

Sideways.

Everywhere at once.

I swept his leg mid-fall—

blink-stepped—

KICKED.

My heel detonated against his back and blasted him straight out of the rift.

I skidded across starlight, boots dragging sparks from nothing—then rocketed forward, a blazing celestial brush-stroke, fists ignited.

"TA—"

My punch hit his guard—

—and his counter crashed into my ribs.

Galaxies didn't metaphorically break.

They shattered.

Glass-fractured.

Gone.

Time stuttered.

I spiraled away, snapped above him—

"RAH!"

DOUBLE HAMMER.

Both fists crushed down on his skull and fired him through the void like a divine meteor.

He flipped instantly—gravity inverted—then launched upward—

LEG. TO. TORSO.

The kick detonated.

I screamed through space, smashing through planets—worlds dying behind me in silent, blooming explosions.

He followed.

Bouncing off moons.

Skipping across debris.

Firing blinding white beams that sawed through the dark.

I stopped mid-air.

Dodged.

Deflected.

Absorbed one—

—and fired it back, violet and screaming.

BOOOOOOM.

Stars ripped apart as Dreadixz was hurled across the void.

He charged back, lunar energy roaring, fists striking in blinding combinations. I weaved—slammed both palms into his chest—

—and reality collapsed.

We tore through fractured dimensions like bullets through glass.

SLAM.

EXPLODE.

Separate.

Reconnect.

He grabbed me.

WHAM—WHAM—WHAM.

His fists crushed into my face, launching me through layer after layer of existence.

We flickered back—

CLASH.

Again.

This time—

TIME RIPPED OPEN.

Past.

Present.

Future—bleeding together.

He flipped over me and spiked my face downward—

BOOOOOOM.

We punched a hole through time itself.

I twisted mid-fall, spun like a broken star, shattered through an infinite realm—

—and burst back into the universe.

I flew across the cosmos—

SMASH.

His forearm crushed into me, launching me through a planet.

I ricocheted off galaxies—

TIME FROZE.

Dreadixz stood inches from my face.

Eyes burning like collapsing stars.

A thousand punches.

One millisecond.

I twisted—grabbed his arm—flipped—

—and THREW HIM THROUGH ANOTHER PLANET.

He snapped his fingers.

Energy morphed into missile-like blasts.

I tore through them, fired ultra-celestial disks—

BOOM—BOOM—BOOM—BOOM.

Shockwaves stacked. Space glitched around my body.

I reappeared in front of him—

DROPKICK—

He vanished.

Reappeared.

Backhanded my arm aside.

We blinked.

Clashed.

Detonated space with every collision.

He carved open space and hurled me toward a planet.

I slammed across its surface, obliterating a mountain.

He struck down.

The planet screamed.

Nova energy erupted around him like an apocalypse pillar.

I blinked forward.

FISTS COLLIDED.

Pure destruction—strike, counter, twist, evade—

His backhand sent me spinning.

I reappeared behind him—rained celestial blasts—

He vanished.

So did I.

The sky fractured. Shockwaves stacked into planetary earthquakes. Galaxies tore apart in the distance.

He grabbed my face—

—and drove a nova punch through time and space.

Then slammed me into glowing ground—

BOOOOOOM.

The planet nearly split.

I flashed behind him—

—and unleashed a titanic beam of ultra-celestial fire.

Space screamed.

It hit—

—and vanished.

He smirked.

"That all you got?"

He grabbed my throat. Warped us violently through shredded dimensions—

I reappeared behind him mid-warp—

CRASH.

Space split open.

My domain.

Silence.

I snapped my fingers.

Five celestial flames ignited.

I vanished—reappeared at his chest—

—and drove my fists forward with the weight of an ending.

BOOOOOOOOM.

Reality shattered.

We were thrown through everything.

Past.

Present.

Future.

A single blink became a thousand wars.

We tore through the First War—pyramids of Markilao towering beneath crimson skies. Celestianites and Lunaranites crashed together in tidal waves of steel and flame. Spears streaked like meteors. Fire split the air. Dust slammed the ground so hard it rang.

CLASH.

The world shattered—

—and reformed—

—and shattered again.

Dreadixz split from me mid-warp and drove his fist into my face.

BOOM.

"THIS IS MY DESTINY!"

We blurred.

Celestia burned.

Towers folded inward like dying stars. I uppercut him through a collapsing spire—

"I FOUGHT FOR DOMINANCE!"

He backhanded me across molten terrain—Flamenites clashing with Oceananites, lava bursting skyward as bodies flew—

"I NEEDED SILENCE!"

Space swallowed us again.

He spiraled, then hammered me toward a planet. I skidded across atmosphere, flickering—glitching—frames snapping in and out.

Flashes.

Everywhere.

Celestia exploding.

Class 101 still fighting.

The Chosen Ones—battered, bleeding, standing.

Archie hurled explosions through gritted teeth, blood streaking his face. Olsen swung with shattered arms, refusing to fall. Crowds screamed. Duke fired neon blasts into the sky. Dark Don clashed with Incarceration, their powers tearing holes in the horizon.

It all hit me at once.

Worlds colliding inside my chest.

SLAM.

Planet surface.

Energy rippled outward. I buckled.

Dreadixz hovered above me, lunar maelstrom screaming around his body. Dark light crawled across his armor as he leaned close and whispered—

"What do you think this is, Don... a game?"

His voice trembled with rage and conviction.

"This is the fate of Earth. And you don't treat it like it

matters."

Flashes.

Soldiers falling.

People cheering.

Every continent.

Every soul of Avangard screaming at once.

A celestial tear slid down my cheek.

I whispered, my voice cracking but unbroken,

"This was never a game. And Earth's fate won't be in your hands... or anyone's."

He froze.

Then he grabbed my head and slammed me into his chest. I coughed celestial blood.

"You wanted dominance," I said, forcing the words out.

"You wanted silence. And look at you—look at what it turned you into."

His grip loosened.

For the first time in Avangard history, EVER

his eyes cried lunar light.

His armor shimmered, jagged, cracking under its own power. He shook violently.

"NOTHING ABOUT ME HAS CHANGED!" he roared.

"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN THIS WAY! HOW COULD A CHILD LIKE YOU—"

He shoved harder—

"—CHANGE ME?!"

My palm ignited.

I pressed it to his leg. Sparks danced. The fury in my voice burned, but it hurt to speak.

"You slaughtered thousands of Celestianites. Turned on your own tribes. Burned worlds just so you could own something

beautiful... alone."

He staggered. Confused. Eyes darting.

I softened.

"Think about everyone you hurt. When you finally understand that... you'll see it."

I swallowed.

"All of this... was for nothing."

He clutched his head.

The ground erupted.

Celestial fire surged from the planet's core, devouring him in white-and-blue flames. His armor scorched, disintegrating piece by piece. His body shook as his own power turned against him.

"You have one chance," I said, slow and final.

"Submit. To me. To everyone."

My fingers glowed.

"Or I snap—and you're erased from reality."

Dreadixz froze.

Nova-lunar energy spiraled wildly around him. Neon blue. Blinding white.

He shut his eyes.

"I... choose... death."

My hand trembled.

I didn't want this.

"I don't want to end you knowing you could change," I said quietly.

"You have a heart. You care. And I refuse to kill you for the wrong reason."

He exhaled.

His shoulders collapsed.

Tears streamed down his face, glowing faintly.

"I don't believe.... you," he whispered.

"Even if you slaughter me.... you'll never win,"

A bitter smile.

"Anybody will try to kill you, any soul will try to kill you, there's gonna be some point where you forcefully meet your demise..."

He met my eyes.

"That demise—implies that the Chosen Ones—should have never been chosen."

He glares at me. "Ever...."

I looked at my fingers.

Energy flooded them. Every atom screaming.

A breath.

I snapped.

Violet light detonated.

White. Infinite.

Space bent.

Time cracked.

Stars flickered.

Universes trembled.

Silence.

He was gone.

So was I.

✧ #1.49 — One Fifth. One Fifth Fulfilled.

✧

I woke up on a throne.

A huge one.

Gold. Twelve feet tall. Carved with constellations, ancient wars, and symbols that felt like they were watching me back. It wasn't stiff or cold like a villain chair should be—it was... comfortable. Like Celestia itself had gone, *yeah nah, you're not getting up yet.*

I blinked. Groaned.

"...Why do I feel like I got hit by existence?"

The last thing I remembered was snapping my fingers and erasing King Dreadixz from reality. Before that—space folding, time shattering, Dark Don getting ripped out of the void, Incarceration screaming like hope owed him money.

After that?

Nothing.

I sat up—and froze.

They were all there.

Olsen leaned against a pillar, arms crossed, already grinning like he knew I'd wake up. Prince was perched dramatically on a golden railing, lightning crackling faintly around his shoes like he was resisting the urge to pose. Archie was upside down on

the floor, flames flickering harmlessly from his hair.

"HE LIVES," Archie announced. "AND HE LOOKS CONFUSED."

Ella stood near the center, calm as ever, hands folded. Demaurion hovered nearby, arms tense, eyes sharp—relief hidden under attitude. Angel was scribbling notes mid-air with a floating hologram, Kai curled around his shoulders in mini form, tail flicking.

Sophia leaned against Emely, who was bouncing on her heels like she drank ten energy potions. Jocabed stood quietly beside them, hands tucked into his sleeves, watching me like he was making sure I was real.

Mason sat cross-legged near the throne, unmoving. Kayson was absolutely destroying a golden fruit platter.

Power stood apart.

Still. Watching. Smiling like this was always how it was supposed to end.

I opened my mouth—

"YOU'RE ALIVE—"

Starla hit me like a meteor.

She slammed into me, arms wrapping around my neck, wings folding instinctively as she squeezed like she was trying to fuse us into one being.

"STARLA—WAIT—I CAN'T—"

"DON'T CARE," she snapped, voice shaking. "YOU DISAPPEARED FROM REALITY."

"I NEED—AIR—"

She froze.

Pulled back.

Saw my face.

Oh stars.

Her cheeks lit up gold-pink. "S-sorry—!" She laughed, flustered. "I just— you scared me."

I smiled, breathless. "...Worth it."

She punched my shoulder lightly. "Idiot."

Laughter rippled through the room.

Javier shifted nearby, leaning heavily on Lonnie Mae's vines. He looked wrecked, pale, but alive.

I stood instantly. "Javi—"

"He's stable," Lonnie said, sharp but tired. "Cracked skull. Severe exhaustion. Will live."

"That's the best sentence I've heard all day."

Javier smiled weakly. "Did... did we win?"

I nodded. "Yeah. We did."

Olsen stepped up and bumped my fist. "You punched a god so hard reality took a nap."

Prince flicked imaginary dust off his shoulder. "Honestly? Iconic."

Ryan Buckner rolled past on his skates, live-streaming. "CHAT, HE'S AWAKE—DROP THE W's—"

Angel snapped a portal open under him. Ryan vanished mid-sentence.

"...You're welcome," Angel muttered.

Before I could say more, Starla grabbed my wrist again—gentler this time.

"Come on," she said. "There's something you need to see."

She pushed open the massive doors.

Light flooded in.

Celestia—reborn.

Golden cities stretched across floating valleys. Magic highways streaked with light. Diamond spires reflected pastel skies. Wind spirits danced. Falcons circled. Barriers shimmered lazily

as Kwa'asja floated half-asleep mid-air.

And below—

A sea of Celestianites.

Every tribe. Every element. Every color.

They saw me.

The roar hit like thunder.

"KING LENS DON!

KING LENS DON!

KING LENS DON!"

My tail curled instantly. My face burned.

"Oh no," I whispered. "That's... a lot of people."

Starla stepped beside me and draped a golden cape over my shoulders. It was warm. Heavy. Real.

"They chose you," she said softly.

I stepped forward.

"No photos—RYAN PUT THE CAMERA DOWN—"

Instant silence.

"I know Celestia wasn't perfect," I said. "I know some of you were taught to hate. Some of you hurt others because someone told you they deserved it."

I drew my daggers.

"That ends now."

I raised them high.

"I won't rule through fear. I won't label tribes as monsters. I'll protect this world as someone who *lives in it*."

I smiled.

"I, Lens Don of Celestia, accept the throne—not to dominate—"

Cheers swelled.

"—but to make sure no one ever fights alone again."

The kingdom exploded.

Jaylen scribbled it down. Checked the box. Boom—law of the land.

We all hugged—Olsen first, then everyone piled in. I smiled.

"If it weren't for you guys... I wouldn't be here."

Later—after hugs, chaos, Sophia roasting Archie, Emely sliding across the balcony on ice, Demaurion quietly staring at the sky, Power resting a hand on my shoulder—we stepped through Angel's portal into the Grolian Forest. It smelled wet, earthy—like a jungle. The sun peeked through the trees, golden-orange against a blue sky. Felt peaceful.

We stood before Queen Grolian's castle, a towering, mossy green palace. Forestinite dragons soared above, and deer-fawn hybrids hopped around like a fantasy postcard.

I brought Kai with me—Ella had sent him to the castle for safety during the war. Eldritch must've had something to do with his insane form upgrade back then.

Lonnie Mae helped Javier limp toward the castle. Queen Grolian was waiting at the doors with open arms. They vanished inside.

I smiled. Javi was gonna be okay.

"Alright," Sophia said. "I'll stay with Javier. Gotta bring him back to Musicia once he's healed. The hedgehog deserves a break."

I nodded. "Thanks."

I stepped through Angel's next portal—back to Celestia.

From the edge of the balcony, I looked one last time at the golden valleys, the pastel skies, the glowing city.

I was king now. I could do anything. But right now?

A king's gotta rest.

"Let's go home," I said. "We all need a break after that insane journey."

Angel opened another portal—a swirling blue gate—and one by one, we stepped through.

On the other side? Sunset. Celestia's outskirts. Purple, orange, and pink sky. Ground shimmering gold.

Angel opened portals home.

One by one, they left.

Ella waved softly. "Rest, Don."

Prince saluted dramatically. "Try not to get boring, Your Majesty."

Olsen grinned. "You'll be fine."

Starla stood right next to me, watching the sky of Celestia.

Then—

I felt it.

I looked up.

Dark Don stood alone on a jagged golden outcrop. Arms crossed. Watching.

Only me.

I walked closer. "You alive?"

"Barely," he replied. "You fight like you hate existing."

"...You helped me."

He shrugged. "Don't get emotional."

I smiled. "Thanks. Rival."

He smirked. Rocket shoes flared, shifting into skates. "Try not to mess it up, King."

"No promises."

He laughed—quiet, real—then shot off across the skyline like a silver comet.

I turned back.

Starla stood beside me. "...You'll visit, right?"

I nodded. "Always."

I took one last look at Celestia.

Golden. Alive. Free.
"...Goodbye," I whispered. "I've got you."
And I stepped through the light.

✧ #1.50 — The End ✧

The portal behind me fizzled shut with a soft whoosh as my shoes hit the familiar sidewalk of Iris Town.

Purple-orange clouds stretched across the sky like the world finally unclenched its jaw. A breeze rolled through—cool, calm, almost polite. I stood there for a second, dusted myself off, nudged my cracked shoulder pad back into place, and started walking.

Everything looked the same.

But better.

Brighter. Like Iris Town had just exhaled after holding it in for way too long.

"Yo! Don! That really you?" Old man Vek yelled from his porch, newspaper in hand—front page, my face on it. Of course.

"Heyyy, Mr. Vek!" I waved back, immediately almost eating pavement. Humbling experience.

At the playground, kids slammed into the fence like I was a zoo exhibit.

"IT'S KING LENS DON!!!"

I laughed, tossed them a lazy salute.

"Still just Don, guys. I'm only king on Saturdays."

"CAN YOU FLY?!"

"No, but I can fall with style!"

Absolute comedy gold. They lost it.

Mrs. Lenu paused her sweeping as I passed the bodega. She didn't say anything—just smiled, proud, and nodded. That somehow hit harder than the cheering. I waved back, tried to stay cool, immediately tripped again. Balance is optional, apparently.

People watched from windows. Waved from balconies. Honked from cars. Some held little flags. Others just smiled like, yeah... we saw that.

A few clapped.

I didn't expect it.

Didn't need it.

But yeah—

I felt it.

And it was everything.

When I reached my house, I turned around one last time. Kids from school. The ice cream cart guy. Jax the mailman gave me a thumbs-up like I'd just passed the hardest exam of my life.

I lifted my hand, waved once, and said,

"Love y'all. I'm goin' to bed for the next five years."

Door closed.

Silence.

Peace.

I dropped my gear by the door—clank, thud, hero starter pack officially retired—and zombie-walked down the hall.

That's when I saw it.

A small box near my room.

Something inside it shifted.

I froze.

I stepped closer... and there he was.

Kai.

My fluffy, snowball-sized Hric rabbit, curled up like a loaf, red eyes half-lidded, ears twitching in his sleep. Completely unbothered. Living his best nap life.

Taped to the box was a note.

"Left your furry friend — Olsen"

...Oh.

My chest pinched.

I crouched beside the box, watching Kai breathe, guilt sliding in real quiet. I really left him. In all the chaos. All the worlds-ending stuff. Rookie hero mistake.

"Sorry, buddy," I whispered.

Kai yawned, adjusted one ear, and went right back to sleep. Zero judgment. Iconic behavior.

I wanted to overthink it. Apologize more. Spiral a little.

But nah.

I was done. Cooked. Exhausted beyond comprehension.

I stood up, shuffled into my room.

Posters? Still crooked.

Bed? Still dangerously soft.

Me? Mentally on 2%.

I face-planted onto the mattress, pulled out my phone, and sent a voice message to the group chat.

"Yo. I got crowned. Gave a speech. Cameras almost melted my face. Prince nearly died backflipping. Starla hugged me like a teddy bear. Oh—and Dreadixz? Gone. Toasted. We win."

Send.

Pause.

"...Also I tripped during the speech. It was heroic. Don't judge."

Send.

I stared at the ceiling for a bit. Sniffed my arm. Made the

ancient warrior decision.

"Shower or sleep..."

Sniffed again.

"...Shower."

Fifteen minutes later, steam filled the room, my hair damp, my soul slightly rebooted. I cracked my neck like an old man with wisdom to drop and flopped back onto the bed.

Wrapped in blankets. Lights low. World quiet.

Before I crash, just this—

I started out a 12-year-old kid full of doubt. Thought I was weak. Thought I needed fame just to be left alone. Being a Hero? That was terrifying.

Eclitsic. Celestia. The battle. None of it was easy.

But I made it through.

I was scared the whole time.

And I still kept going.

This—is just the **first step....**

EPILOGUE

10,000 Years Later into the Future (Time Travel)

I tore through the ash-choked sky of Celestia, neon cannons humming beneath my armor like a caged animal begging to be unleashed. Every beat of my heart sent a pulse through the suit, too fast, too strong.

Below me, the city was dead.

The Enchanted Kingdom—once light, once wonder—was nothing but a burned-out shell. Streets cracked open like broken bones. Towers collapsed into themselves. Smoke spiraled upward, swallowing the stars, while flickers of fire chewed through what little history remained.

A screech tore through the sky.

I snapped my head up just in time to see it—

a grotesque bird, massive and twisted, feathers jagged like shattered glass, eyes glowing red with something that *should not exist.* It dove straight at me, talons spread wide, a living missile fueled by hate.

My cannon roared.

Neon green light split the sky, ripping straight through its body. The creature screamed, then shattered—sparks, smoke, and broken mass raining downward as it hit the ruins below.

Gone.

I slowed, hovering over the destruction.

The circuits in my armor pulsed, synced to my heart, my *real* heart, the one buried beneath metal. The same heart that dragged me through time.

I could feel it again. That pull. That pressure in my chest. Every time my heart surged, reality bent. Timelines cracked. Futures overlapped.

My heart wasn't normal.

It never was.

It could tear me through alternate timelines—through futures that shouldn't exist yet, through worlds already doomed. I didn't *choose* to be here.

My heart chose for me, *I'm Duke. Fifteen years old. A fallen Celestianite.*

I looked down at the ruins, *Now stranded ten thousand years into the future.*

I scanned the land, searching for signs of life, anything, but all I found were scars.

Not a great sight, b*ut I'm here... helping the Pre-Heroes. Because if I don't—Avangard falls.*

The memory of the Power Gems burned behind my eyes.

If I could just get those Gems... if I could hold them again—this future wouldn't exist.

I clenched my fists, *I've had a rough start. I know that. I've done damage. Real damage. I was destructive. Reckless.*

Images flashed through my mind, Kingdom of Hearts in ruins. The words I'd spoken back then, sharp and wrong.

The future will die in my hands.

That wasn't me, I thought. *Not fully.*

I felt it now, the truth I'd been avoiding.

I was under his spell. Forced to drop the Gems. Forced to leave.

Forced to destroy an innocent world. My jaw tightened, *Even my own words weren't mine.*

A puppet.

Used.

And discarded.

The glow from my suit intensified as anger ignited beneath the guilt.

"This world is broken," I said, staring at the shattered horizon. "But it's not over."

My heart surged, reality shuddered around me for just a moment, like time itself flinched.

Not while I'm still breathing.

I looked up. The stars were barely visible through the smoke, but they were there.

And as long as my heart kept pulling me through timelines...

as long as I could still fight fate instead of running from it...

"For the future," I said, voice hardening, "I will fight."

In the Sacred Dimension

"Is this place supposed to keep me contained for a while?" said Dironyx, who was chained

up against an invisible wall with chains bound around both his wrists and ankles. His white eyes of fake divinity flashed, his body hanging down as he held his head low. "It's been billions of years..."

Zeni both stood around him, observing Dironyx as they held their staffs. Their bodies were a searing cosmic light of tremendous heat, pulsating with more glow as they gazed at Dironyx.

They were lofty and lean, clocking fifteen feet over Dironyx,

who was only eight feet tall.

"What is this supposed to do to me?" Dironyx raised his head up—one of his eyes being large and round—with a few black cracks forming around it. "It's not changing anything.... It's only fueling my excitement to get out of here and murder you guys in the process..."

The camera barely shuddered as it was all concentrated on him. The black Xenith figure with the beaming white contours around his body, pulsing narrowly with every tiny bit of movement.

"You've been standing here for a long time, right?" he raised an eyebrow. "How are you guys not tired then... this is a pretty boring job."

"We're Zeni," spoke the first one, turning to Dironyx while pointing the staff at him. "We don't get tired from watching something—" his eyes narrowed, "even if we have to stand in the same area for a billion years..."

"In the Sacred Dimension, there is no noise, no sound," the other Zeni displayed, gazing up at the swirling galaxy with a variety of multicolored lights. "This place's job is to drive you crazy."

He turned to Dironyx, who was beaming even though blood was soaking from his wrists and ankles.

He sighed, "For some reason, you do not seem to be affected.... I don't know how—but I think it has something to do with you being a maniac..."

"Maniac and me don't mix," corrected Dironyx. "They don't sound right, they sound stupid. The last time I've ever seen the light of day was during the end of the war..."

He grasped his fists, hard enough for dark energy to bend around his arms, but quickly dissolved into the void due to the binds.

"Power... ejected every single Xenith and me from that kingdom. Scattering all of us toward different planets from across the universe. While I get the 'worst' punishment—"

He keeps his eyes hooked onto the two Zeni, the rounded one quickly blinking back to its original state. His thin eyes appeared through the darkness, light spilled from the two like twin dwarf stars.

The rays went through both of the Zeni.

"....the Sacred Dimension..."

"Am I supposed to be scared? Am I supposed to—*heh*, feel something?"

Dark energy burst to life around his wrists and into his ankles, charging with blackjack light and a visible aura spilling from his eyes and body.

The two Zeni readied themselves, scowling at Dironyx as they watched the dark energy begin to form around him and start charging with enough energy and force.

Dironyx tensed his fists and tightened them, harder, looking into the eyes of the two Zeni while the vibrancy quickly overloaded around the restraints.

He grinned, a smile shining from the radiance of his two eyes.

BOOM!

Metals shattered. Splinters fled into the air.

Both feet slammed into the ground. Shaking the dimension.

Energy snapped and coiled around his legs toward his upper body like black lightning as he beamed and faced the two Zeni, who quickly stood their guard as they watched DIronyx.

"I've haven't done that in such a while," he chuckled softly. "It's a shame that instead of me really just being stuck.... I could've had a way to escape this entire time..."

The force of darkness charged around his fists.

His eyes flashed his power to life.

Shockwaves rolled across the dimension.

He took a step and chuckled harder, slowly curling his deadly black claws into a fist, "Would've been a shame if I just decided not to..."

The first Zeni lunged.

Dironyx stood a step back.

FWISH!

In a bolt, he flashed near the first Zeni, fists cocked back as he moved mid-air in slow motion—eyes streaking in a scalding white while having a wide smile shimmering across his face as his fists filled with immense dark energy were inches from the Zeni's shocked and fearful expression.

It blurred.

BASHK!

Tore through the Zeni's head.

FWOOSH!

He hurled it across the dimension.

The head hit the ground, rolling as black blood slowly poured from the Zeni's body.

The other Zeni turned to stare at the head of his dead friend, constantly showing on his own breath without even moving due to how shaken he was at the situation.

He looked around, suddenly Dironyx was gone—and there was nothing but a glowing white and black splatter across the floor.

FWISH!!

Dironyx was behind him, feet off the ground—eyes glowing while still somehow holding off that grin.

Dironyx twisted.

The Zeni spun.

BASHK!

Immediate backhand to head contact, smashing it off the body and hurling it into eha it, only for it to hit the ground for the void—black blood splattering against the gronunce as it did.

Dironyx flickered in front of it, grinning as he lifted his foot up to slam it into a detonation of blood, splattering his legs and foot.

He gradually turned around.

The two lying bodies of the guards that were watching him, and one of their heads sat still, while the other head was long gone and also a mess.

His claws twitched, his grin shuddered, his eyes jolted.

"RAHHHHHHHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!!!!"

He slammed his foot against the ground, hard enough for the dimension to form a crack in the sky.

"Power.... I'll find you... and once I bring the Xenith Empire back...."

His eyes twitched again, "Becoming limitless... will be your own fault..."

He slowly turned to face the swirling galaxy in the sky above him. Then a flashback occurred.

The separation of the five ancient artifacts, but one came to mind...

"The Lost Gem..."

TO BE CONTINUED...

About the Author

Lens Don Theagene who goes by his international internet name Astraldude, is a very young fantasy writer who writes the genres including, Fantasy, Science Fiction, Superhero, Action Adventure, Contemporary, and Horror. One of his very first debut novels is Heroes of Avangard #1: War of the Celestianites. The guy loves world building, inspiration, and using his own creativity.

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